

Jenny Angel

ABOUT THIS BOOK

This is the story of Giannina Angelino, a beautiful American girl who flees from the squalor of her home in a Boston slum and assumes the role of evangelist. As "Jenny Angel," her strange personality with its inner mesh of conflict and loneliness gives her a magnetic appeal to the countless troubled souls and outcasts who flock to hear her message of salvation. Hoax, or divinely called? Perhaps she does not know herself. As a preacher, her influence is immense; but as a woman she feels a bitter isolation. Thrilled by the adulation of unknown masses, she yearns for personal love. Her quest for love is vibrantly described. The doting, inept husband who cannot give her what she seeks; her son starved of affection; the middle-aged business-man who abandons his home to work for her; and, finally, the tough, confident crook, Rocky Patina, who alone offers the ruthless kind of love she secretly craves. Torn between ambition, the passions of the flesh, and her faith, Jenny Angel fires the imagination of her readers as she stirs the hearts of her audiences.



Jenny Angel

A NOVEL BY

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to

HAROLD S. LATHAM

Jenny Angel

Book one

Chapter one

GREY snow capped the jumbled rooftops, melted into black waters, and, between city and harbour, stuck wetly to the skeleton of the Atlantic Avenue El. From his fifth-floor flat Luigi Angelino stared at the dark and the cold and remembered sun on the blue Bay of Naples. Bitterly he cursed the new country and his failure; helplessly he cursed the frail Katie O'Toole and the child she had just borne him, a girl. In Italy it would have been a son; but not in Boston, not with Katie, not now. In the back room the baby was crying, the midwife moving busily about; but no sound came from Katie. Impotently he banged his fists against his thighs, whirled, and stormed out and down the long sour-smelling stairs toward the corner saloon. Meanwhile Katie, exhausted by fear and pain, waited helplessly and wept that the child, Giannina, was a girl and liable to the wretchedness of women.

In the next years, presiding over the household like a pale and ineffectual wraith, Katie had little reason to change her mind. When Giannina was four, Teresa was born; and Tony followed. Luigi drank and ranted and swept the city streets three times weekly. Charity provided

day-old bread and second-hand clothes. The children attended school, played in the streets, stole an orange or two, or earned a legitimate penny running errands. In all this the Angelinos were one with their neighbours except that in the midst of their rubbish heap the child Giannina budded and ripened like an exotic plant, tall and beautiful and alien to its native ground.

One day Katie, ill in bed and weak, called her eldest daughter and spoke falteringly to the girl who had always been a stranger to her. "You're different, Nina. You're not like the others. You feel things. You make up things —maybe too much." Her eyes were agate-brilliant, and her sticklike fingers picked at the quilt.

Giannina hugged thin arms about her knees. She looked curiously at Katie out of enormous black eyes and nodded. "Yes, Mama." She knew that she was different. Didn't the neighbourhood children come running for her to tell them what to do, what to play? And, when they were tired with that, didn't they ask her to act out a story? Nina with the big voice and the bigger imagination. A love story with tears! No, a murder with screams! Better, cops and robbers, Indians! She was happiest then, dramatizing her own tales, yelling, laughing, sobbing, doing anything to hold her listeners spellbound. Already she knew the intoxicating power of capturing an audience. She knew the wild delight of standing alone before them, their eyes on her. And she knew something else, too, instinctively as she knew most things: that she was beautiful. She knew it without pride, yet with satisfaction because such beauty could be useful, even profitable. At night, after Teresa was asleep, she would sneak out of bed, light a candle, and study her own naked young body in the mirror, her growing breasts, her flat abdomen, her slim

hips. Once she had put up her hair, secretly borrowed Katie's best frock, sneaked out to parade past the older boys who loitered in front of the pool halls and beer parlours. They had stopped joking and fooling to leer after her with flushed cheeks and avid, admiring eyes. Flouncing by, laughing to herself, she was heady with the upsurge of power. Mama was right: she was different from the others. She was way ahead of them; she intended to keep it that way. "Yes, Mama."

Katie was saying. "I'm never coming back, Nina."

Puzzled but unperturbed, the girl asked: "Why?"

"People who go to this place—this hospital where they're taking me—people never come back."

Tears dribbled under Katie's lids. She wanted to reach Giannina now, but that was impossible. The girl had an odd, impregnable independence that her mother had not pricked in twelve years. She could not be touched by another person unless she wanted to be; usually she did not want to be.

Giannina inquired in a matter-of-fact way: "Did you tell Papa?"

"No. Not yet." Katie licked cracked lips and tasted salt.
"Papa is a bitter man."

"Papa is a drunk."

"He's unhappy. Once, long ago, he was . . ." But Katie couldn't explain all the lost years. "Anyway, Nina, you look after the family, Teresa and Tony. You take care until they are big enough. Promise." She begged her daughter with her eyes.

"All right, Ma—until they are big enough. I can manage. I can manage anything I have to."

"So—" Katie breathed, then said sharply: "Go away now. Let me rest. Go." Something in the child appalled

her—something vibrant, dynamic, frightening, she didn't know what. No one Katie knew could tell her what made her daughter different, sometimes darling, sometimes devil. Whatever it was, she couldn't help the girl now. Katie lay all night dry-eyed, drained of emotion. In the morning the ambulance took her away.

The next day Giannina quit school. For four years she cleaned, cooked, tended the children. She put Luigi to bed if necessary and avoided him the rest of the time. Sometimes she earned a few cents fashioning artificial roses. For the most part she did the housework adequately; but she was happy only when she could loose her fancy to weave the wonderful tales she shared with the neighbourhood. Then her black eyes glistened, her voice was vibrant, and she was entranced.

On the morning of her sixteenth birthday Giannina gave the children breakfast, prepared the lunch, and then coolly but emphatically announced to Teresa: "You're twelve now, same age I was when Mama died. You can take over here, I'm going to get a job."

Obediently Teresa put away her books and picked up the broom; it never occurred to her to argue.

Giannina, in her best blue plaid, marched down Atlantic Avenue to the office of an Italian importer and promptly acquired a job packing olives. She began to feel better. She liked the early morning along the harbour, the air pungent with sea and fish, the gulls diving for refuse, the snorting horses and creaking carts backing into the wharf's warehouses. She liked the evening with the boat lights bobbing out on the bay and the El streaking overhead. She liked having her own money to spend. She liked getting away from the family.

And she liked the girls at work. She listened greedily to

their brazen talk, their shrill jokes, and their advice on picking up extra cash of an evening in the swarming taverns of Scollay Square. She even joined them one April night. They taught her how to tease and invite boldly, yet carefully, the chosen candidates. She complied up to a point; but then she kept right on walking. Next day the girls mocked her. She heard them placidly and continued to spear olives, popping them into bottles with swift, unerring fingers. At closing time they told her: "When you're ready, let us know, baby. With that face and figure you could make a fortune." Giannina merely smiled. In time, she thought, in time, maybe.

A year later President Wilson declared war, and all the streets where she worked and walked were crowded with sailors, each one overwrought and driven by a need to squeeze every last experience out of life before it was blown up. Giannina was seventeen now and seeking excitement too, but not in noisy, beery places along the waterfront with anybody who could pay the bills. She was different. She would choose her own way and her own time.

She chose a Sunday in May. All that afternoon she had been lounging on her bed, glaring up at the stained ceiling, fretfully aware of Teresa sucking a lollipop on the next cot. For the thousandth time she thanked the saints that she, Giannina, was not like her sister, stupid, homely, and dull. Abruptly she sat up, running quick hands down her slender thighs, stretching her long, smooth legs.

Watching her, Teresa sighed admiringly. "You're real pretty, Nina."

Giannina shrugged. Teresa's opinion didn't interest her. She had long since detached herself from her family and from the flat that cooped them up together. Apathetically

she rose and wandered to the narrow window and gazed down at the alley that sliced between grime-encrusted tenements. Two flights below, the Malettis' perpetual line of grey diapers half hid the cracked cement, the overflowing ashcans. Along the avenue the El's black carcass trailed ominously, and beneath it the dirty masthead of a fishing schooner jogged at the pier. But overhead a swatch of incredible blue promised that somewhere sun was toying with the sea, mellowing the near-by crammed streets, whitewashing all humanity. With the sun's stray shaft warm as a hand on her throat, Giannina was suddenly lonely, desperately lonely. "Damn," she whispered. "I've got to get out of here. This rotten, rotten place!" She leaned hard against the sooty sill. On the opposite fire escape a mangy cat paused and scrutinized her scornfully with bland yellow eyes, arched its back, and spat at her. "Yeah!" In fury she thrust her head far out of the window and spat back. Then she whirled and began dressing, choosing her best white piqué and the scarlet-flowered hat.

"Where you going?" Teresa asked plaintively.

Giannina didn't answer.

"When you coming back?"

Silently Giannina buttoned on her gloves.

"Well, gec, what if Papa comes?"

"You know what to do. Keep out of his way. If he's too bad, you and Tony lock yourselves in here. He'll sleep it off."

"O.K." Teresa began unwrapping a candy roll. "Have it your way."

"Goodbye."

Giannina picked up her purse and went into the dank hall, boosting her skirts as she walked downstairs, blinking as she emerged into sunlight. The neighbour women had

brought out their kitchen chairs and were lolling expansively along the sidewalk, gossiping cheerfully; children were batting a ball in the street; black-whiskered men were drowsing on orange crates by the greengrocery. Absently Giannina answered the friendly greetings and evaded the tumbling children. At Atlantic Avenue she turned, altering her pace to a long, undulating stride. She looked back at the hungry-eyed men in uniform, but she spurned them one by one when they fell into step beside her. She believed that there would be a man somewhere to-day whom she wanted. She would know when he was near. Until then she would keep on walking.

The crowded places were well behind when she saw him out on a rotting pier—alone, seated forlornly on a post. A new uniform sagged on his lank frame; his skin was fresh and sunburnt, and his hair was fair as hay. "Hello, sailor. Homesick?" she said throatily.

He unwound his body uncertainly, his cheeks crimsoning under her level eyes.

"It's a lovely day," she remarked. "What are you doing?"

"Nothing. That is, I was just sitting, gawking at the ocean. I never saw it before. My ma in Kansas never saw it at all. I was figuring how to tell her. . . ." He let the words fade out as of no consequence.

Giannina smiled encouragingly. "The ocean is not very pretty here. Let's walk."

He inspected her, the dark eyes, pert mouth, sweet breasts, trim waist. "You don't look like one of them." He gestured toward the city.

"No, I was just lonely," she said quietly. "I thought you were, too. That's all."

"Holy smoke, yes!" He took her arm. "Let's walk.

Then maybe have some supper. I got to talk to somebody.”

She laughed and walked close to him, aware of his hand on her bare elbow; and after a little she was no longer lonely.

They sat a long time over supper in a rowdy pizza palace and drank sweet red wine and pressed their hips and knees together beneath the marble table. He talked about Kansas, his voice husky with wine and with the knowledge of Giannina’s nearness and his blue eyes lost their forlornness. Through the sound of violins she could scarcely hear his words; through the screening smoke she could barely discern his features; but she could see his hands move over the table, lifting a glass, crumpling a napkin—brown hands, strong but gentle. She watched them until she longed to feel them upon her. She loved the young sailor then, and wanted him.

When he stopped talking, she smiled again. His eyes widened, his hands tugged at her.

“Come on. Let’s get out of here. I’ve a short leave, and I’ve got a room. Come on.”

“Yes.” She followed him quickly.

The room, lit by a single swinging bulb, was even smaller and bleaker than her own: the only furniture, an iron bed, an oak bureau and a straight chair. She sat on the edge of the bed and welcomed him wordlessly. He flung aside his cap and approached awkwardly. “God, I never! You—my Lord!” But he didn’t stop, and she received the brown hands gladly.

A clock struck seven. Giannina awakened in the strange room, feeling wonderful, exultant, but bewildered until she remembered. The young sailor had gone, leaving no

trace. She knew little about him save that he had made extraordinary love, tender and firm but not brutal. She was joyous, not the least troubled at his absence, because she was certain that he would be waiting for her again at the pier.

She went there after work, in the late blue afternoon when the tide was just turning; but she found no one. Even when the tide was high, he failed to come. Finally, very early in the fog-shrouded morning, she trudged homeward, and her burden of loneliness was bigger than before. The shadowed, shuttered streets, the houses, the halls showed no evidence of life. Nobody alive in all the world but me, she thought, nothing, nobody. Then she noticed the light under her own door. God in heaven! Not Luigi! Not now.

Her father, bearded and bleary-eyed, sat hunched on a straight chair confronting her. At her entrance he exploded: "So you come home now, eh? Last night not at all. Now this hour. Fine thing for young girl, eh? What you got to say?" Rising, he staggered and hung on to the chair back. "So—what you say?"

Without a word she tried to reach her room. He grabbed for her. She stopped, repelled by the thought of his hairy hand on her. "Leave me alone," she cried out. "Don't touch me. Don't."

"Hah! You want your papa leave you alone? What about other men? They keep you out all night. They leave you alone too?"

She stood mute but defiant.

"So you no talk? I hear lots a talk round here. No good things. Maybe I got a wild kid. No-good, crazy kid. What you say now?"

She answered evenly. "I must take after you."

Her arrogance merged his bitterness, his failures, his drunkenness into one terrible rage. He lunged, and struck her twice across the cheek before he fell. She ran to her room and locked the door.

"Papa real drunk?" Teresa inquired groggily. "He's noisy."

"Yes. Listen. I'm going away."

"Sure." Teresa ducked under her blankets. "Sure, you go away."

Giannina packed her scant belongings into a straw suitcase and went out again, stepping cautiously over Luigi. Mice skittered behind broken walls. The Malettis' baby whined. Everything smelled of stale cabbage and unwashed toilets, of the dark and the damp.

Outside, rain and fog relentlessly enveloped her. She ached all over, and the welt on her cheek smarted as fiercely as did her anger. She walked, not knowing where to go, only knowing that she was never coming back. After an aimless hour, she began to cry tiredly. Her tears, the rain, the salt spray from the harbour mingled and stung her face.



Chapter two

A BOUT six o'clock Giannina had coffee at an all-night café. When she came out the rain had ceased, but the fog still clung like a clammy second skin, shutting out all else. She was really lost now and stood peering up for a street sign. Then, abruptly out of the shifty greyness, reared the austere tower of the Church of the Sacred Heart. Dimly she recalled having come here once with her mother. She remembered incense and tinkling bells and the chant of kneeling priests. She remembered also that if someone were in trouble the sisters were sympathetic. Leaning back, she searched the church wall for a life sign. The black, shut windows, the massive carved doors put her off. She passed on, hesitating, and then, far down the block, a beacon, blinking on and off, on and off, drew her. She found a ship's lantern above a gilt sign: "Light house Rescue Mission. Will you be saved from life's stormy seas? Let us throw you a lifeline." Around the sign curled a rope, one end of which dangled free. Giannina pressed against the store window and saw, inside, bare brown walls cluttered with garish posters, a covey of wicker chairs, a fringed floor lamp still lit above a flat-topped desk. No one was in



sight, but the door was unlocked; she entered, letting it slam as a warning behind her.

Presently a thick-set, middle-aged woman sleepily shuffled forth. "Well, you're the early bird," she remarked not unkindly, and rubbed her eyes with the back of her wrist. She switched on the overhead light, and in its glare the two studied each other. "Well, miss, what's the story? And tell it straight." The small eyes behind the rimless glasses were suddenly bird-bright and penetrating.

"I'm in trouble—I haven't anywhere to go—I saw your sign," Giannina said simply. She sat down on the end of her suitcase, tired and cold and scared.

"M-m-m. Say now! You are sopping-wet, and your cheek—let me see that. It needs fixing. Somebody sure whacked you." The short, plump hands tenderly traced the welt while the flat voice rattled on. "But I don't know what to say. This place is mostly for men, bums looking for bed and handouts. Got a dorm full back there. Me, I'm housekeeper, you might say. Mr. Ken—he's boss—he's not here yet. Now about you."

Giannina listened vaguely, thought stubbornly: If I sit tight, she'll think of something. I can't. She has to. She wants to.

"So what do I do with you? Well, I tell you, missy, for now we'll dry you out and fix that face. You come back in my room. I got an extra cot. After that, we'll see."

Carrying the suitcase, the housekeeper led the way to a tiny rear room. Soon the sodden clothes were off; balm cooled the girl's cheek; hot tea warmed her body.

"That's a bad whack. Man's hand, I figure. Girl like you shouldn't be fighting. Some fresh guy?"

"My father," Giannina said without malice. "He was

drunk." She didn't care, because that was elsewhere, eons ago, not to-day, not a few streets away.

"So? We'll fix it. You'll see. That ointment, and tea, and a bit of sleep—they'll fix you up. And—oh, yes, Jesus, too. Jesus and hot tea can save the world, I figure."

The woman folded back the sheet under Giannina's chin and crooned words as soothing as the cluck of a mother hen, "Oh, there, one thing more: What's your name? I got to call you something." She paused before adding tactfully, "Any name will do for now. By the bye, mine's Mollie—Mollie Betts."

The girl replied faintly, "Giannina Angelino, and that's real."

"It would have to be," Mollie chuckled. "Nobody would make up that mouthful. Too much for me. From now on you're—you're just plain Jenny around here. Jenny Angel. That's it, Jenny Angel!" She left quietly, humming to herself.

Jenny woke gradually to Mollie's insistent: "Come on. Up now! You've had enough. You got to see Mr. Ken before the boys get back. Come on, Jenny. How're you doing?"

Uncomprehending, she stared at the big face, ludicrously framed by its brush-stiff hair. Then she recalled kindness and warmth and the exquisite peace of being cared for, for the first time in her life. She reached up and touched the rough cheek close over her and smiled. "Better," she said, and sat up.

While Jenny dressed Mollie talked. "Look, I've been telling Mr. Ken he needs help, another woman. You won't be no trouble, I told him—sleep here, eat here, work here. I talked fast." She regarded the girl's reflection in the cracked mirror seriously. "Besides, I figure you

probably need to be saved. Pretty thing like you in this hole these days. Like as not you'll go straight to hell unless we fix that too. You ever been saved, even once?"

Jenny was bewildered. She had never heard such talk.
"I don't think so."

"Tut, now! You got to stay." Mollie wagged her head emphatically. "Come on out to the kitchen and get fed; then we'll attack Mr. Ken. He's an odd one, Mr. Ken—got money and learning, but he's an odd one. Come on now."

Jenny trailed her down a blind passage to the torrid cave of a kitchen, where a huge man was bending over a kettle of stew on the black stove.

"Hello, Dolan—God be with you. See what I brought!" Mollie said, all in one breath. "Some help, maybe. I want you should meet Jenny Angel. Jen, this is Dolan. He ain't so bad as he looks."

About-facing painfully, Dolan muttered, "Shut up, you."

He was lame; he wore a black patch over one eye; and his face was yellow and greasy like the stew sticking to his ladle. He spoke sneeringly out of the corner of his mouth, so you would know that he was as good as you were, whoever you might be. He had had a bad night, and was tired of down-and-outers riding the tail coats of the gospellers. He was tired of the gospellers, too; but Mollie was a good sort—gave him an overcoat last freeze-up and an extra buck when he came crawling back, sick and repenting, from a binge on which he had drunk up his wages. Repenting—that's what they called it here when you said: "For God's sake, take me in! I got nowhere else to go. For God's sake."

He surveyed Mollie now with his swollen good eye.
"It's about time I got help. Forty half-starved, ungrateful

mouths twice a day, and nobody to help but that skinny black boy Rudy who's always running off to play his trumpet somewhere. So it's time I got help." Then he became conscious of Jenny and straightened up, flattening his hands down over his soiled apron.

"This here's Jenny Angel," Mollie told him again. "Drifted in this a.m. Got an egg I can feed her?"

Dolan inhaled grossly. She was lovely even in this damned kitchen, she in that red dress with a kind of light about her, with those black eyes, that rich hair. She must have come out of heaven or hell. Nothing like her seen on this earth, and he'd been around. From hell probably, with that wound on her face—but Angel, Mollie had said, Jenny Angel. Anyhow, she didn't belong out here with him; for sure, she didn't. Without taking his eyes from her he bellowed: "Get her out. Go on, Moll, get her out of my kitchen."

"Hey there, wait, Dolan. You've been fussing for help. This girl needs three squares a day and the grace of God. Give her some coffee and an egg, Dolan."

"Fix it yourself, but get her out."

Miserably Dolan returned to his stew. Beauty hurt him, like something dangerous, like fire and live wircs, not to be handled at all. She belonged up high somewhere, now he thought about it—up in a palace, maybe, or on a mountain top or at the Pearly Gates themselves. But not here. Angel? Not in his kitchen.

Mollie bustled over the scrambled eggs while Jenny stood beside a pile of chipped crockery and tried to make the queer place and Mollie and Dolan come real and alive. After she had eaten, Mollie ushered her back down the hall.

"I don't know what ails him. He's not bad really. Likes

to make out he's tough." Mollie swung one arm around the girl and hugged her affectionately. "Don't you worry. The good Lord notices the sparrow's fall, and it's a cinch. He won't overlook a pretty kid like you. Now we'll go see the boss."

Jenny was trembling inside. No woman, not even Katie, had ever hugged her with love; and it was good. She wanted the comfort, the food, the shelter Mollie represented. She couldn't go home. She wouldn't go back to work where Luigi could find her. This wasn't much of a place, but it was all she had.

At the door into the main room Mollie cautioned her, "Some of the boys will be coming in. Don't mind them. Just talk to Mr. Ken straight and careful. He's a good man, like I said—polite and educated, I guess, but a queer one. Oh, there! Wait a sec."

The front door had swung ajar. A dozen men drifted in like phantoms in a nightmare; some were grim, some giggling, but most of them were vacant-eyed and indifferent. Jenny looked at the seedy procession with curiosity and pity.

"Poor fools!" Mollie sighed. "Not a God-fearing one in the lot. Not one ain't been saved six, seven times right here. Don't seem to stick to them. Well, they're gone, and that's Mr. Ken over at the desk. Go on."

Kendall Ames Wyatt was a Boston blue-blood descended from the *Mayflower*, with a family line of governors and bankers who dwelt in purple-paned mansions on Beacon Hill and attended King's Chapel at Christmas and Easter—intellectual, physical, social giants, all. Among them he had moved apologetically, a nondescript presence, for all of his thirty years. A weakling, remiss in

school, he had survived Harvard on extra sessions and the grace of a professor-friend of his father's. His two brothers were everything he was not: the oldest, a successful corporation lawyer, the pet of Boston's Republicans; the youngest, a physician specializing in hypochondriac socialites. Both had married well. What matter that neither wife was attractive? Each had lineage and money and promptly conceived a brood of tots of whom the grandparents could be properly proud—as they were not of Kendall. He, they felt, was a throwback to some unfortunate ancestor, and occasionally each regarded the other's family tree with suspicion. He didn't belong; but there he was with his perpetual sniffle and frightened fumblings, a nagging reminder of holes in their own perfection. Full-grown, he scarcely topped five feet five, and he weighed a scant hundred and thirty. His shoulders sagged beneath his expensive tweeds as if even they were too much to carry. His head was large and round, feathered with blond tufts. His nose arched high; his finely shaped hands played ceaselessly, nervously with paper clips, buttons, each other, as if ashamed of repose.

Already Kendall Wyatt had failed at respectable careers in insurance, banking, selling. When his grandmother died leaving him a nice income, the family sighed and shook the collective conscience clear. They were dutiful, inviting him to family affairs, weddings, funerals, finding him an occasional date. When they remembered they chatted with him on family matters; after all, although he was a poor lamb, he was not a black sheep.

His morals were impeccable, but not from his own choice—anything else shattered him. Liquor sickened him. Gambling guaranteed a bitter loss. Girls were his mortal grief. He had never been able to cope with them,

not even with the wallflowers, not even with the professionals. Once he had visited a call house in the West End. The whole experience had been horrible, and he had lain helpless and impotent on the tumbled bed while the ribald, well-paid little slut laughed at him. Afterwards, he had paced the icy February streets and cursed and wept and gone home hating all women.

That was five years ago, just before he had come to the mission. He had never walked in West End again. There was no need of it: the gutter was his job. He had come here out of curiosity, out of boredom, certainly not out of any concern either for God or for the men. At the suggestion of a churchgoing friend of his mother's he had accepted this unpaid position. Five years ago he had opened the door; he had been here ever since, sometimes even pretending to himself he did not know why. He despised the men who shambled before him, but he pitied them too because in his own peculiar way he understood their failures and their loneliness. He stayed because, quite simply, this was the only place in the world where he could feel that he was better than his companions. When he crossed this threshold, he was the superior, the big man, clean, fed, educated, moral. He laboured long hours and raised money because here alone he could hold up his head.

Kendall Wyatt had been checking the month's plans when Mollie approached him about the girl. He had just noted with revulsion that Abner Holtz would be conducting one of his evangelistic services, offering his dubious route from hell to heaven, dragging susceptible souls after him. "Hell!" He drew a black circle around the date. "Hell!" And because the expression was apt he

almost smiled. But his smile curdled. He had just had a wretched night of being polite to a stray spinster whom one of his sisters-in-law had palmed off on him. Right now he especially detested all women, and so, hearing Mollie's story, he resolved to dispatch the girl at once: No place for girls—sorry. Go away. It would be very easy.

Frowning, he glanced up when Mollie called: "Mr. Ken, this is Jenny Angel. The one I told you about." And then he saw Jenny straight and supple before him, her black eyes big and inquiring, the slanting winter sun full on her translucent skin, her high-boned cheeks. For minutes Kendall Wyatt gazed at her as if hypnotized. A cheap clock clicked dryly. He thought: She's very young. I'd better send her away quickly, before it's too late. Too late for what? He didn't know. All he knew was his astonishment when he found himself saying:

"Of course, Jenny Angel. Mollie says we need you. You may stay."

Jenny bent over the desk, her fingertips spread out on it, her eyes disturbingly level with his. "Thanks," she said softly. "It is generous of you."

"That's what we're here for—to rescue the perishing. You are perishing?" He mocked the phrase and tried to drag his eyes from her slender white throat. "You must be, or you wouldn't be here. We're all perishing here, one way or another. Sit down." He had risen, and now he felt his knees giving way.

Jenny was giving him her close attention. He wasn't like anyone she had known. He was polite, quiet-spoken, clean. He remained standing until she sat down, and she liked that. When she spoke again her voice had a rich, caressing quality that made it more than sound:

"Thank you. I'll be a good worker, I promise. But I

need to learn a lot. Perhaps you can teach me? I left school at twelve. And there's this what Mollie says." She pointed to the gospel pamphlets heaped on his desk. "You could teach me?"

"God knows." The brightness of her pleading dazzled Kendall. If she had seen the clown in him she gave no sign. He began to sweat. "What could I teach you?"

"Much." She was smiling at him almost indulgently as if she understood who granted the favours after all.

"We'll see. I'll assign your work later. You'll want to get settled. I'll see you again. At supper maybe."

"Thank you." She held out her hand.

Timidly he took it. But he didn't look after her when she went to join Mollie. Deliberately he selected a blue and gold pamphlet, "Jesus, Saviour, Pilot Me," and began tearing it to bits, littering his blue-tweed knees and the cracked boards beneath his feet.

Chapter three

MAY broiled into June; the tar on the sidewalks stuck to the outcasts' shoes, and the garbage pails stank within an hour. The heat was a suffocating belt around the city, and so Ken Wyatt shortened the required religious services, opened the dormitory early, and ordered ice in the water pitchers. He could afford to be good to his limited world because, for this little while, his world was being good to him. Jenny graced it. In the mornings her strong arms worked a broom, her fingers sorted the mail. In the afternoons her face beside him was lucent with asking and listening as he taught her English and etiquette and the rudiments of history.

While he taught he dared not look, lest his heart throttle him and thus destroy his importance to her; for he was important to her only as long as he had the learning she craved. He had no other illusions then. Sometimes he thought how weirdly backward this was: she who harboured passion and independence and laughter, she should be his teacher. Jenny, show me how to walk proudly, how to laugh, how to kiss, above all how to cut off the past as cleanly as you did! Oh, Jenny, how is it to live? But

English has its rules, and grace its manners; and the surface requires polish, however terrible its depths. So be it. Every day when the lessons ended he forced himself to search the dark eyes for hints of scorn or mockery or boredom. When she smiled back he was grateful and humble before her. Once he asked:

"Are you happy?"

She was slow in answering. Flies buzzed and bumped against the screen. Boys and yelping dogs chased the passing ice cart. Dolan and Rudy slouched by toward the kitchen.

Mechanically Ken rubbed the fingernails of one hand against the other coat sleeve. "Jenny!" he said pleadingly.

The black-winged brows cleared. "Yes. I was only thinking of a way to tell you. The kindness—Mollie—I never. . . . Yes."

Afterwards, resting in Mollie's green and yellow cubby-hole, the girl decided that it was true: she was happy. Unaccustomed kindness was sweet; learning, good; belonging anywhere, even here, was important. Why should she not claim happiness? Take Kendall Wyatt now. Although homely, he had breeding and education and quietness. He was a gentleman, and she had never known one before. He was quality, Beacon Hill, Harvard, and he knew the thousand things she must learn before she could get ahead—where, she didn't know yet. She smiled contentedly. What if Ken looked at her meanwhile with desire? She had controlled men before. Ken would be easy. She got up and began putting on a sheer leaf-sprigged summer dress. She rummaged in a drawer for earrings and found them alongside Mollie's dog-eared Bible. She paused suddenly then, her hand midway, for

here was the chill symbol that half drew, half terrorized her, the one blotch in her happiness:

"Happiness," Mollie had warned, "is no good. All that stuff of Mr. Ken's is no good unless you're saved by grace. See, Jenny?"

Jenny hadn't seen, but she had heard. Nightly in fanatical ritual Mollie prayed for her. In her long-sleeved nightdress, with her hair bushing through her net, her bare feet jutting out behind, plump hands together like a child's, Mollie put Jenny's case before her God and begged that He be pleased to stir the ignorant heart of this lovely girl. Since He was not immediately so pleased, her prayers became louder and cruder. And Jenny had nightmares about her soul in torment and her body roasting eternally in brimstone. Maybe she should repent and be saved; but she didn't know exactly how nor why. She had borrowed a pile of pamphlets from Ken's desk: "Walking on the Waters," "Does Hell Await You?" "Black Sins and White Atonement." She had responded to the sonorous roll of pompous phrases, to rainbow-coloured illustrations and lurid descriptions, and she had been led to tackle Mollie's Bible, reading aloud, not comprehending the sense but enticed by her own voice in magnificent cadences. Beyond that no revelation occurred, no lamb of God, no divine grace. Mollie prayed on.

Thinking uneasily on these things, Jenny was screwing on her earrings when Mollie burst in, perspiring and puffing.

"Jenny, my God, Jenny, listen. I was in the big hall dusting around the pulpit just now, and I saw—"

"Take it easy." Jenny swept an armful of laundry on to the floor and pushed her into the rocker. "Easy, Mollie."

Mollie clutched at Jenny's arm. She croaked: "Listen,

girl. You listen now. I was cleaning in there, and I saw—God strike me dead if I didn't—I saw an angel with white wings and fire on his tongue; and he told me to bring you, Jenny, you, to the altar of the Lamb. You got to repent and come to Jesus. To-morrow when Reverend Holtz is here. He'll show you."

"Y-yes." Jenny shut her eyes against Mollie's madness. Repent? Emblazoned on her lids was the picture of drunken Luigi and hatred, of stupid Teresa and neglect, of the young sailor and lust; but she was neither sorry she had lived with these nor sorry she had left them.

"Jenny, you got to come over here with me. Something's got to bring you over to Jesus."

"Sure, Mollie, sure, sure." Jenny was shivering. "Anything you say, Mollie."

All the next morning before Holtz's arrival, Kendall Wyatt sulked, vowing he would never again sponsor this sort of holy hogwash, in spite of the mission board. He thought with revulsion of Holtz's tobacco-stained teeth, his leer, his ribald anecdotes, and the public preaching that trapped the crowd into fawning belief in him as some Grand Vizier of the Almighty. He was always troubled by Mollie's rapture, but to-day he was doubly troubled at what she must be telling Jenny. After lessons he even attempted to persuade Jenny to stay away from Holtz's performance.

"Cheap show," he muttered.

But she had the impression that he was merely joking and went anyway. It was like nothing she had ever before witnessed.

A half-hour before service Dolan locked the outer doors because the hall was already filled with shouting, soul-starved humanity. The vagrants and ne'er-do-wells from

the mission dormitory occupied the four front rows, bored, amused, vexed according to disposition. Grimly erect in a wooden chair on the platform, Kendall Wyatt endured his duty while beside him the towering, red-faced Holtz wrizzled, anxious to get under way. Off to one side, Jenny and Mollie sat together. Mollie's cheeks were afire, and her nose twitched. Spasmodically she grabbed Jenny's hand.

"I know this is it. Like I told you. To-night, Jenny!"

Jenny nodded and waited with rising excitement. A vibrant, shimmering something seemed to leap around them, from person to person, drawing each one to the edge of his seat, as if begging for a gaudy miracle. Drab people with drab lives crying out for thrill and colour and exaltation. Suffering people seeking for solace. Stifled people yearning to be free.

When Holtz judged that the gathering was duly pliable he leaped up, bellowing: "You're a good audience to-night, a good people. Let's praise the Lord. Everybody—hallelujah, praise the Lord! Sing out, brother, sing out, sister! 'When the Roll Is Called Up Yonder.' "

They sang passionately with Holtz sweeping them on, his arms flailing for loudness, his palms flattening for softness. "Draw me nearer, nearer, blessed Lord," sweet and mournful to make you sigh; "Though your sins be as scarlet, They shall be as white as snow," smug and triumphant. Jenny was transfixed. The outpouring of voices, the washing of spirits, the oneness of the crowd! What power that man had to make them feel like this all together! She was immersed, light-headed; her mouth felt dry; her chest pinched. Beside her Mollie sobbed ecstatically.

After a roaring "Amen" Holtz wiped his balding head

and launched into his major scenes. He became Jesus driving out the moneylenders with a lashing whip; he became the personification of Good wrestling with Demon Rum. When Demon Rum passed away some cheered; some in the front row guffawed loudly. Holtz soared on, conjuring up and slaying each of the cardinal sins to the accompaniment of "Yea, Lord. Precious Jesus. Amen. Praise the Lord. Amen." Jenny's eyes were glued to him. Sometimes she listened. Sometimes she thought: To act like that, to capture people like that! Rescue the perishing, succour the dying. O God, teach me! O Reverend Holtz, show me!

At his climax Holtz darted into the congregation "Are you saved, brother? Are you a Christian? Sister, come to Jesus!" Pausing only to pull a wavering victim to his feet, he shoved and exhorted a few who straggled forward. An old man moaned. "I'm a boozer, but I quit." "Hallelujah!" answered the crowd gleefully. A bawdy woman screeched: "I been cheating on my man. God forgive me!" The crowd clapped delightedly. "Praise the Lord!" Like children at follow-the-leader, others rose and paraded after Holtz. Oh, but it was a good show that night, and the amateur actors, shorn of inhibitions, enjoyed their public soul-searching as heartily as did the audience. Then suddenly, in the midst of an "Amen," Holtz raised his arms, his shadow weaving grotesquely against the black wall. A full rest. A shout: "Ah, the Lord is speaking to me. Hush! He says—what's that, Lord?—he says there's one among you not yet come to grace. He tells me to go and bring her. I go, Lord."

Dramatically he advanced on Jenny. She shrank. Mollie babbled: "He means you. Go to him now."

"No—yes." And she allowed herself to be led to the

platform where the others, who had already performed, sat back on their heels to watch.

"Kneel," Holtz commanded.

She knelt. All eyes feasted on her. All ears drank in her least whisper. She knew this, and the fright went out of her.

"Confess—confess," Holtz screamed at her. "Repent—repent."

She bowed her head, trying to find good words. Confess what? That there had been a sailor and loneliness? Repent what? That she had left her family? But she was still glad for these things. Above her Holtz was breathing nasally, "Speak, speak." Out there the people were waiting. "I confess," she said in a voice tremulous enough to wring the heart, clear enough to reach every ear. "I confess, I was ignorant and sinful. I did not know the Lord. Now I plead for forgiveness. Oh, I do repent." Triumphantly Holtz patted her hair. "Sweet Jesus forgives thee, sister. Thou art washed in the blood of the Lamb and made whiter than snow." The audience echoed, "Whiter than snow."

Numb with emotion. Jenny covered her face with out-spread hands. She listened to Holtz praying; she listened beyond his outpouring. Another voice called to her, saying, "Daughter"—a strange voice, unearthly, pure, uttering her name, "Jenny, daughter, Jenny." Mollie had promised that God would speak to her. Now it was true! "Yes, Lord!" She swayed with faintness. The far voice stopped. Only Holtz rolled on. She peeked through her fingers at him, then behind him at Kendall Wyatt, tight-lipped and ashen, leaning limply against the chipped paint of the chancel wall.

Holtz finished and lifted her to her feet. She meant to

return to Mollie. Instead, she walked the other way, up the steps into the pulpit, and looked at the people one by one, and loved them because she saw that they first loved her.. She spoke to them eagerly. She told them how she had never known peace, how she had been lonely in body and soul and was tempted and guilty in the sight of God and man even as all of us, how she had found the mission and been welcomed, and how, to-night, she was glad in the service of her Lord. When she stepped out of the pulpit they shouted themselves hoarse: "Praise and Amen. Praise. Praise."

Passing by Holtz, she felt his fury at her having stolen his show; but she didn't mind. He was a fool, after all. The people really loved her, Giannina Angelino, Jenny Angel. She returned to Mollie's heaving bosom.

"Angel, angel! I saw God's hand on your shoulder up there. I named you right. Angel."

Holtz lifted his arm and voice in oily benediction, and Kendall Wyatt strode off the platform unsmiling past Jenny. She called to him, but he was gone. Wistfully she glanced after him. Why could he not share her joy? Didn't he sense how she could talk, and how they would listen? Couldn't he guess that this was the most joyous night in her life? She was saved, wasn't she?

"Mollie, what's the matter with Mr. Ken?"

"Don't mind him. Mr. Ken's a queer one. Angel, God's angel! Praise the Lord!" Mollie rocked back and forth and let the tears trickle down her nose.

Chapter four

FOR days after that night Mollie brimmed such ecstasy that Jenny more than half believed in the angelic visions and the divine promises. Maybe she had been chosen by Mollie's God for some still obscure purpose. Had she not heard the voice? Had she not spoken with the tongues of angels? Each day she rose to expectancy and retired in disappointment. After a while she felt let down and lonely and turned anew to her studies with Ken; but she never quite gave up her hope. Now Kendall offered her poetry, love poetry to expose his own heart through other men's carolling. He also offered her small gifts, a brooch, silk hose, a scarlet sweater and his constant, dumb adoration. She accepted everything and was flattered and satisfied. Her life was channelled in the mission's confines—the work, the studying, and the broken men whom she rarely saw, but whose presence and need actually dictated her day. For the men there must be food and shelter, always preceded by hymn singing and Scripture according to the by-laws of the mission board.

"We take care of the inner man," Mollie explained

once while they were preparing supper in the kitchen. "We patch 'em up, body and soul, for just one night. It all comes out at the seams next day. Not too much actual soul-saving here. Mr. Ken—he don't take much time for religion."

"Mr. Ken ain't a believing man," Dolan remarked unexpectedly while he spooned coffee into a boiling pot. "He's talking to men who ain't believing either. What you expect?"

Mollie brandished her bread knife at him. "Don't you talk mean about Mr. Ken. He's good."

"Mr. Ken's good, but he ain't believing. Those bums—they got nothing, nobody. We're rubbish, we are, we——" He turned around; jagged lines carved the agony across his mouth and around his blind eye.

Anxiously Jenny began heaping bread slices on to a blue plate. Rudy, carrying a tray of cups, paused, his curly head cocked. Mollie stared at Dolan. An inner blackness masked his face. He spat at her:

"You gospellers, you Jesus people, you Jenny with that face—Christ in heaven, you don't know, you——"

From down the hall wavered the drear and doleful "Amen" of the last hymn. Dolan shook his head as if to clear it, then shouted: "Go on, Rudy, get them cups out. The bums'll be coming in and busting things, if we don't feed them. Get going!"

Rudy fled. Mollie kept on cutting bread. Jenny started to ladle out cooked cabbage. Nobody spoke. After all, what was there to say?

There was the work then: the men fluttering to the Lighthouse lantern like gnats to a lamp post; Dolan fuming in the kitchen; Mollie babbling in the bedroom; Ken waiting everywhere. Jenny drifted, forgetting there

was also a world outside, a war, a family, a sailor.

September swirled up the streets and scattered newspapers in the alleys. Indoors, October lit the fires; and, outdoors, it drove the ragged men against the wall to find early cover. November draped its dourness over all. The sea, the sky, the city, and the men were sadly, greyly one; but to Kendall Wyatt it was spring, the only spring he had ever known. Every moment, everywhere, Jenny haunted him, because he loved her with the quiet desperation of one who expects to lose all in the end, but hopes meanwhile to salvage a few weeks, a few months. She was so young; she could spare him some of her time. At least once in life every man deserves to love without pain, without humiliation. Maybe Jenny, who had never laughed at him as others had, who respected his slight learning and appreciated his material security—maybe this Jenny with the long legs, the lovely breasts, the soft mouth—could teach him how to love. Was once too much to ask? "Jenny, save me!" Ken laughed feebly at himself for using the familiar phrase: "Save me!" And what should he do to be saved?

All December the answer to that swelled in him. Alone in his fourth-floor room in the Beacon Hill house, behind his desk at the mission and at every step between, he thought about marrying Giannina Angelino. Upon his great bed, he imagined her beside him, close, closer than close, and his desire made him rise and stand barefoot at the window watching the snow as it softly, softly veiled the State House dome. Cold and white and pure, the snow; but it never shut out Jenny. What could he offer her better than she now had? Why, security, position, name. But later? All right, later she would outstrip him. Vows or no

vows, he could never keep her beyond a couple of months, a year. Or maybe just one night. But that would be reward enough to risk all. Every instant his heart hammered out his tearing need. Marry her. Ask her. And if she laughs and says no? Ask her.

Without warning he did. They were preparing the Christmas dinner lists when his hand brushed hers, and his voice choked. He dropped the papers. "To hell with these! Jenny, will you marry me?" In a blur he told her what he could give her. He told her, "I love you." Then he was ashamed of having spoken, and ashamed of being ashamed. "Don't answer now. Think about it." He got up and stalked out.

In amazement Jenny sat and thought. She ought to have guessed that for Ken desire would mean a marriage proposal. Poor, ugly, respectable, desperate Kenny! He had so much to offer—except himself. She had nothing to give in return—except herself. Under the circumstances that was a fair arrangement. Besides, she couldn't stay here at the mission forever. She wanted to get somewhere. As Mrs. Wyatt she might, so why not? She ran to tell Mollie.

Mollie was badly shaken. "No, Jenny, no."

"Why not? Look, Mollie, what have I got? Where can I go from here? I mean, you have to put your foot on the first rung of some ladder if you want to climb!"

"No. Mr. Ken couldn't take you. You'd swallow him up. He's too good for that."

"He's kind, but I can give him something."

"What?"

"What! What any woman gives. I'll bet he's never had a woman. He——"

"No. You'd hate him, Jenny." Mollie was bouncing on the bed. "In a little bit you'd hate him."

Jenny wasn't listening. "I'll do it. Mrs. Kendall Wyatt!" She pranced past Mollie.

Mollie said stubbornly, "You couldn't love him."

Jenny grinned. "Don't be sentimental, Moll. Of course not. I don't love anybody. But I can marry him."

They were married just after Christmas by a harassed justice of the peace, with Mollie a tearful witness and Dolan a surly one. Jenny stood straight in a slim blue crêpe with scarlet roses in her arms and heard the vows and felt desolation all about her. Suddenly and violently she wished she had not come. She might have quit then had she not pitied Ken and the pathetic gratitude she guessed in him as he slouched beside her. Actually Kendall Wyatt was not grateful. He was numb; he heard nothing and saw nothing, for fear smothered his hope. True, he thought, she had never laughed at him. True, he counted on his consuming passion for her to erase that awful inadequacy in him. Yet he, who believed in nothing, had kept on praying: "Make it all right, Lord. God, let it be all right." Now, with the fatal pronouncement made and signed, at this last moment, he knew that God would not make it all right, and that he himself could not.

Within fifteen minutes the Justice had taken his money and departed. Within the half-hour they had drunk their coffee and sampled the baker's wedding cake in the dismal kitchen. Only the inevitable remained. Ken kept watching Jenny, the softness of her shoulders, the tautness of her thighs, and when he followed her upstairs he worshipped her ankles. But his head already ached with the terror and the effort of his longing.

Upstairs he had cleaned and painted adjoining store-rooms for a bridal suite and furnished them with his own

pieces, the four-poster bed in which his grandfather had been born, the kidney-shaped desk, the armchairs in maroon upholstery. The family had seemed quite unperturbed by his move, and he had been glad to leave them, but to-night, his wedding night, he was homesick for the big, formal house on the Hill where no one asked questions and no one expected anything at all from him. At once Jenny, a length of frothy white over one arm, retired into the bathroom. Kendall went to the window and, in the semi-dark of the brass bed lamp, briefly envied the free strides of the pair of policemen patrolling the block before the great bed hauled him back. Bleakly he thought that he could not go through with it. In his ears rang the ribald laughter of the girl from the West End. Sweat dampened his hands. He jumped nervously when the door opened behind him and Jenny emerged, clad in the sheer night robe, discreetly draped over her hips but revealing the fine skin of breast and waist through lace insets. While fear and desire struggled together within him, he saw her moving toward him gracefully.

She stopped, frowning slightly. "What is the matter with you? Aren't you coming?" She kicked off her slippers and slipped into the bed. "We are married, you know."

"Jenny, I—— Forgive me." He knelt heavily by her. "Please, Jenny, help me." He sensed the pity in her hands that lightly stroked his temples. Pity, he thought dizzily, like the pity she would have for a hurt puppy. Oh, but she had not laughed. "Look, Ken," she began presently. "Please don't carry on so. You wanted this. Why else did you marry me?"

"I don't know. I wanted so much. I—I—can't——" He was sobbing.

Hiding her annoyance, she reached down strong hands and tugged him up beside her and cradled his head on her shoulder as if he had been her child, not her husband. After a long while, she persuaded him to undress and stretch out beside her. In the dark she laid one hand on his bare chest. With the other she began to acquaint him slowly and sweetly with the ways of the wedding night. When, toward morning, he fell, spent and panting, beside her, she tucked the blanket around him and turned her back and shuddered with revulsion at the memory of his twisted mouth and bulging eyes, at the clumsy, hurting acts. She buried her face in the pillow and finally brought peace by remembering the quick, kind knowledge of a strange young sailor.

Thus Kendall Wyatt had his one night. It was enough. He did not ask for more. When Jenny moved into the next room he made no comment. He adored her still. His fancy and his dreams were all of her. He existed for the moments she was near. But of her nights he asked nothing though his own were sleepless with yearning and despair. Frankly relieved by his attitude, Jenny returned to living as before. Beyond billing him for new clothes, she chose to forget that they were married. "You were right, Mollie. I shouldn't have done it. But I guess it won't matter in the long run." She was wrong about that.

On a raw and windy afternoon she discovered how wrong she was. Furiously, she ran to Mollie who was mending sheets in the kitchen. "Damn him, damn him!" she groaned. "I wouldn't have thought he could! Oh, God, not this——"

Automatically Mollie put aside the sheets and turned on the gas plate. "Tea," she said.

"I won't have a baby. I won't."

"So." Mollie sighed. "All right, Angel, sit down and drink this. Calm yourself. You're a big girl, and you're married long enough."

"Married!" Jenny snorted. She leaned on the wooden table and warmed her fingers around the teacup. "Look, Mollie, I don't want a baby."

"What you want won't matter much, I figure."

"I could kill myself! It's all my own stupid fault. That one night! Ye gods!"

"Takes two, so I heard." Mollie poured her own tea, sipped awhile, and then began chattering to the effect that babies were no new thing, were kind of nice even—being necessary, you might say.

When Jenny extended her cup for a refill, her hand was again steady. "Well, there it is," she said resignedly. Then she asked: "Mollie, where's your God in all this? What about your visions now?"

Mollie answered promptly: "Right there, Angel. No change. Maybe He wants to teach you patience and pain. You're young. He ain't forgetting you. Not a bit. I saw Him, remember?"

Jenny nodded wretchedly. She did not want her glory postponed. "Tell me again, Moll, about the angel." When the story came to an end and the golden vision was restored to them both, she said quietly, "About the baby, Mollie, he's mine—just mine."

Jenny's son arrived at the height of an early September hot spell. Mollie accompanied her to the hospital and regretfully yielded her to a brisk nurse. Thereafter, hour on hour, she steered an impatient course between waiting room and Information. Ken stayed at the mission, unwanted, inert in the heat, trying to think about nothing

at all and thinking only: Jenny, Jenny, I'm sorry. When she had first announced the baby, he had been shocked and incredulous that he, Kendall Wyatt, had sired a child. It was beyond believing, and therefore, to him also, the child was uniquely hers. Only Jenny could create life; he could not. Whatever the laws of God and man and biology, the child was, somehow, Jenny's alone. From afar he had watched as she passively endured a healthy pregnancy under Mollie's joyous ministrations. Still from afar this morning, although within hand's reach, he had heard her matter-of-fact telephoning for the cab. And even now he couldn't manufacture an expectant father act although Rudy and Dolan eyed him curiously while they, too, waited for Mollie's call. Jenny, I'm sorry.

Meanwhile Jenny in a spare and lonely room met pain for the first time in her life. With rising crescendo the spasms shook her like a dog shaking a rag doll. She was startled that birth was such an agonizing affair, and death so easy. She lay on her back, both hands gripping the iron rail of her bed and let pain possess her, cutting, churning, crushing. Perspiration poured off her forehead. Her teeth cut into her lower lip until a drop of blood rolled down her chin. Once she thought of Katie: Poor Ma. Once she thought of Mollie: Good old girl. Mostly she thought about the pain, proud that she could outlast it without crying, that she could fight it without fear. Not once did she remember Ken.

Between labour bouts she repeated aloud Mollie's last words: "Remember, Angel, the Lord plans something special for you. Trust the Lord." She thumbed the Bible Mollie had left, squinting at the fine print, reading over the index backwards, Peter, John, Luke, Mark, Amos, Daniel, Jer— Pain boomed its exacting counterpoint

to labour's rhythm. "Jeremiah," she said loudly, "Jeremiah." Much later, when she opened her eyes to find herself collapsed and quiet, it was "Jeremiah" that she said again.

"Look, girl." The white-coated doctor waved his pen at her. "You're fine, and it's a boy. Could you give me his name for the record? I've got to get going."

"Jeremiah Angelino Wyatt."

"Good grief! Well, O.K.: Jeremiah A. Wyatt. But he'll never forgive you."

She repeated, "It's a boy, and he'll never forgive me." And she cried herself to sleep.

The next day Mollie appeared. "He's a perfect laddie, Jerry is, with his mama's looks already and God's own blessing on him." She gave Jenny two red apples and all the news of the mission. "About Mr. Ken——"

"Not yet," Jenny interrupted, "Not yet, please. Later."

Jerry was four days old when Kendall Wyatt came, bearing American beauty roses and feeling frightened and foolish among the arriving fathers. He discovered Jenny in a ward with three new mothers. Her eyes and her hair were blacker than ever against the sheets. She looked exotic, he thought, or holy. The blood pounded in his head: his throat shut off. When he laid the roses beside her, Jenny was surprised and let him take her hand. Unsteadily he reported that it was hot in the streets and smelled of thundershowers, that Dolan was on good behaviour, that Mollie was the same, that he had missed her unbelievably. "Jenny, how are you?"

"Fine. The baby's fine too."

"I know. I saw him. The fathers—— No matter." He swallowed fiercely and crushed her fingers until they cramped. "Listen. I've been thinking a great deal. I can

give you more. I can take care of you and the baby. I mean we can move out of the mission. I can get another job. The Wyatts, my family——” On the word “family” he stumbled. Jenny was not his family. Nor the baby. Only the Wyatts of Beacon Hill. “My family will——”

Gently she disengaged her hand. “No, Ken. I want to stay where we are. I need Mollic. Never mind your family no. . . Later perhaps.”

“Anything you say, Jenny. I’ll do anything.”

“You’ve done enough already.”

The silence strung out sharp and stiff between them like barbed wire. Jenny attempted meagre amends. “Besides, Mollie says the Lord has special plans for me still. I keep believing that. Really I do.”

It was like seeing her through the long end of a telescope, Kendall thought. She was so very far away, lying so peacefully in the high bed, speaking so strangely. She was neither wife nor mother to anyone. “And your son? Do the plans include him?”

“Mollie says——”

Mollie! He wanted to call Mollie queer and mad, a fool and a liar, but the sudden light in Jenny’s face prevented him. He finished feebly, “Mollie’s all right. But, Jenny, I want you to know the boy will always have the best.”

“Yes,” she agreed softly. “He’ll have it.” Yes, the child would have everything, but she wanted something too. “Mollie says——”

Kendall Wyatt rose, pulling his jacket about him, bone-cold in spite of the September heat. “Well, goodbye, Jenny.” And without looking at her again he walked away.

Jenny closed her eyes. “Mollie says——”

Chapter five

FOR two years Jenny Angel waited. Nothing happened. No heavenly messengers. No divine instruction. She fed on faint hope and on Mollie, solid, faithful Mollie who reassured her daily: "In a little while, Jenny. The babe must grow a bit. But some day you'll know. Wait now!"

She waited because she saw nothing else to do. Here was the child she had to tend. Here were Mollie's golden voices. And here was Ken. Not much of a husband, to be sure; but if Mollie's God proved a failure, here were Ken's promises, the name, the money.

Here also was Ken's teaching: an hour or two each afternoon, she still gleaned from him and his books whatever she considered useful or enjoyable—but only that. Sometimes he protested: "You should know facts too, Jenny. Biology—government—"

"Why?"

"Because facts are the body of truth. You ought to know the truth." He thought he was being logical.

Jenny tossed her head irritably. "What is truth? You've told me yourself that what is true to-day may not be true to-morrow. Every theory blows up an old one, so why

should I worry? What is true to me is whatever I happen to believe is true, and that's enough."

"But it's not enough," he argued. "You must respect facts."

"Oh, for heaven's sake! Let's read a play or something!"

And he let her read a play because he recognized the beginning of scorn in her "for heaven's sake." Too long she had not laughed at him; soon now it would come. Yet even this fear left him when he heard her read. Oblivious of the clanging summer traffic, of the dreary shuffle of men outside, oblivious of everything except Jenny, he heard her, lost in her until her final silence jolted him back to reality. The liquid black eyes met his triumphantly, knowing her special magic had moved him.

She had been moved herself; therefore, when she had finished with Ken she descended upon Mollie to read aloud again while the baby puttered around the floor and Mollie rocked and mended infant socks. Now Jenny tried her skill on the Bible, playing her voice on its magnificent phrases as a musician plays his instrument—the swift ascents, the thunderous judgments, the inexplicable mysteries—until Mollie wept at the words of God and the baby sat still. Jenny wept too, but she didn't know why.

"You got God flowing in your veins," Mollie explained, "right there in your blood. You'll see."

As the weeks passed, Jenny found herself more and more willing to let Mollie take care of Jerry. She took Mollie's place in the kitchen and helped Dolan at supper. He refused to become friendly, but his odd reluctance intrigued her. She asked questions. He answered obliquely, letting his voice bound off the wall in front of him, riveting his eyes on the dishpan. Partly flattered, partly amused, Jenny continued to try to discover his secret. One day

while they were washing the dishes, she asked, "How come you're here, Dolan?"

He lifted a huge tray of soup bowls and clattered them into his pan. After several moments, he said, "I got nowhere else to go."

"You could earn more money anywhere else doing dishes," she pointed out.

"I don't need money. I need to be safe. It's safe here." His words were muffled as though they had been packed away a long time.

"Safe?"

"Yeah, I been here ten years, and it's safe."

She wiped the plates and piled them in neat rows on the wooden shelves. "What are you afraid of?"

Water seeped down the drain. Rudy brought more trays. The suds foamed up again. Finally, Dolan said: "I killed a woman. Long ago. Long way off. She had to be killed. I done it. With my own hands." Under the hot water his great hands clutched convulsively at the suds. "I'm safe here. That's all."

Jenny kept on wiping dishes. Staggered by Dolan's confession, she didn't quite believe it. Maybe he was crazy. He seemed so sometimes, and did now. His bull neck corded, his one eye blazed, his wrist muscles bunched brutally. He could have murdered a woman; but she wasn't frightened by him, only excited. Presently she inquired, "Does anybody know?"

"Only God and me and some cops out there. And now you. You won't tell." The one eye glittered on her.

"No. No, Dolan." After a while she added: "Why do the others come—the men? They hate us, I think."

"The bums? Because their bellies are empty and they want to be filled, because the cops would pick them up

outside, because—— How the hell do I know?" His face turned sly and watchful. "What do you want to know for?"

"I just wondered. That's all. They come and come and hate us. Are they lonely too?"

"Lonely? Lonely—God Almighty! A woman busts us up and we got nothing but empty bellies and coldness and misery, and you ask, Are we lonely! God in heaven!" Suddenly he slumped, sitting down and beseeching her, tongue loose and begging like a hound dog. "Go away now, Angel," he said softly. "Please, just go away."

After that she thought a lot about Dolan, about the sin he claimed for his soul, greater than any other and without the grace of God to ease it, and, for a while she was sorrier for him than she was for herself. But with the multiplying of the dun, drab days, she stopped troubling about him. She became obsessed with herself, with the pyramiding restlessness and the waxing conviction that, after all, she did not belong here. Gradually she began to know that she would have to leave. But when, and how? Maybe, she thought, maybe she should just walk out on the whole gloomy mess, quitting them all, including Jerry—just run away again and start over elsewhere. She almost did it, too.

One January afternoon under a smoke-veiled sun, Jenny left the mission, striding rapidly, coat tugged tightly, hair ensnared in a scarlet kerchief. Aching with contrary emotions, she hardly saw the steep, cobbled streets, the steamed-up panes of cigar and café fronts, the numberless narrow doorways, the banks of blank windows set in dead brick. Until she reached the harbour and tasted salt, she didn't even glance up; but there she halted, for overhead was the El, to her left the fishing boats, to her

right the tenements of childhood. Curiously she considered the place. She could almost hear the mice gnawing behind the plaster, the Maletti infant squalling. To herself she named over the people who lived there: Luigi, papa; Teresa, sister; Tony. They meant nothing to her. She thought that she ought to feel bitter or sad or guilty because of them, but she felt nothing at all. Her life had been split neatly, like a log, and the two parts were no longer related. A band of boys chasing a mongrel swarmed out of an alley. One of them might be Tony, but she didn't care. She didn't even look after them. Instead, she hurried away.

For a long time she walked, and the loneliness returned, the slicing, yearning loneliness she had experienced that one May Sunday. If any man had said to her then, "Come," she would have gone. But no one noticed her. When she arrived at the pier where the young sailor had been, she paused, amazed, because, now that she was here, she understood that this was where she had been coming all the time; that it had been, somehow, foreordained; that it was important. Suddenly a wild excitement dizzied her senses. As if in a trance, she advanced seaward. The wind moaned; the boards creaked; the waters sucked under the pier. She leaned against a post and stared at the bay, steel-cold and choppy, at the cloud-frosted sky, at the tugs towing barges, at the fishing fleet chugging home, at the sea gulls wheeling and crying. She looked at everything carefully. Something was about to happen, she thought in mounting agitation. On her knees on the splintery pier, she raised her head and shouted: "God, tell me. Tell what you want. I don't know. God tell me." Mollie had cautioned, "Wait," but she could wait no more. "Now, please, God, if you have anything for me,

show me, now!" She stifled her breath to listen. Waters lapped on rotted wood, boats mumbled, gulls screeched. Nothing else. Nothing at all. Mollie had lied. A paroxysm of sobbing raked her, left her feeling ridiculous and very lost.

In the twilight an occasional lamp sparked the way home; one pale, inadequate star hung above the mission where the lantern blinked its eternal greeting as Jenny returned to it, running, cold, exhausted, hurt. When she passed Ken's open door, he called out. "Wait, Jenny. This damned cold." She stopped, thinking how ugly he was propped up in bed like that, red-eyed, red-nosed, ugly like everything else that night. "Listen," he was saying, "I can't talk to the men. Tell Dolan to let them in—and no hymns or preaching." A siege of coughing interrupted him, and he sank back wearily. "Go on, Jenny, tell Dolan, please."

Afterwards she would awe her audiences when she described the next half-hour. She would be awed herself, quivering at the depth of her emotion. Afterwards she would say: "When I left the bedside of my sick husband that fateful day I was heartsore, having prayed much for guidance and having received no answer from God. I went down the stairs, and it was very dark, darker than the road to Hades. I felt my way falteringly. And then, suddenly, there was a great light about me, a silvery glow not of this world, more beautiful, more holy than earthly light. Overcome with wonder and weakness, I sat down on the stairs and folded my hands in prayer and shut my eyes against things too wondrous to behold. I remembered Paul blinded on the Damascus road. Then the Lord spoke to me, too. Oh, it was the Lord. There is no other

voice like His! When you hear it, you know. And the Lord said, 'Daughter, daughter, why persecutest thou me?' And I cried, 'What would you have of me, Lord?' And He said: 'Go, yourself, and preach to my lost and strayed lambs. Speak to these poor men, for they are not men only but souls for me. Tell them to repent and come, and they will be forgiven and will find peace. Tell the sinners, "Come." ' And I said, 'I am but a humble woman—how can I preach?' And the Lord said: 'Thou art my chosen one. I am with thee. Go.' I opened my eyes and, lo, the light and the voice had gone away. I sprang up, strong and full of glory, and I ran down the dark stairs never stumbling, for the Lord Himself had appointed me my mission."

That was what she would declare later, what she would believe; but it wasn't exactly what happened. When she left Ken she headed directly downstairs, to speak to Dolan. By chance she met Mollie and told her first that the service was cancelled.

Mollie was dismayed. "But there has to be something!"

"Well, for goodness' sake, Moll, it won't matter."

"Don't talk like that. We're here to feed them Jesus, too." Then Mollie's button eyes gleamed, her words trumpeted: "It's the Lord's doing. Like I always said. It's now, Angel. Listen, listen. He says it now. He says: 'Jenny Angel, you go preach to them.' Clear as a bell, he says it now. Listen."

Jenny heard the wind clattering the blinds, Jerry jumping up and down on Mollie's cot, Ken coughing upstairs—nothing more; but when she looked at Mollie she believed her. "What could I say to the men?"

"That's for you to figure. The Lord's appointed you. You won't have trouble."

"Leave me alone five minutes," Jenny said. "I want to think."

Behind the closed door of Mollie's room she sat rigid, telling herself what she so desperately wanted to believe. Maybe if what Mollie said was true and the Lord promised this, why, maybe—O Lord God! Well, what will I say? If you plan to sell something, what do you do? You find out what people want. You offer that. What is wrong with these people? Loneliness, Dolan said, failure, empty bellies, emptier souls, and behind those lust, greed, murder. Well, maybe I can invent a partial answer for them, give them what they need. Something I read yesterday to Mollie—Peter trying to walk on the waters and almost sinking until Jesus put out a saving hand. They are like Peter, alone, drowning, all of them. I can evoke that scene: I can be Peter sinking; I can be Jesus saving; I can be the embodiment of faith itself. I can be anything, anybody, and the audience, any audience, will love me. Praise the Lord! She ran out to Mollie.

"I've got it," she cried. "Go tell Dolan to turn up the heat in the auditorium."

"We been sitting in the cold to save coal," Mollie recalled apologetically.

Jenny laughed. "You tell Dolan to put on the heat, and send me Rudy right away. Oh, Moll, I have an idea! We're going to give them a good show."

"A show?"

"Why not? I'll bet God Himself gets tired hearing people like Ken. Hurry now, go on."

Rudy came loping down the hall, his teeth white in his chocolate face. "You want me?"

"Don't you play the trumpet?"

"Sure, sometimes. I earn extra cash in a dance band."

"Can you play hymns?"

"I can play anything, ma'm," he answered with confident dignity.

"Go get it, then, and come to me right away."

"All right, if you say so."

The Lord has spoken. It had taken Him long enough! As for now, Jenny decided, she would clear the whole chancel. She would be alone up there in a red dress, under the gilt cross. She would be Peter and Jesus, and she would remember that before her were lost and lonely people, and she would say to them, "Come, come to Jesus, come to me." And they would come! Oh, but they would come to her. From now on everybody would come. She leaned across the bureau and peered into the cracked mirror and knew that she was beautiful and full of holiness.

Chapter six

KENDALL WYATT huddled his fever-baked frame against the doorjamb and squinted down the dark stairway, guessing at what was going on below. He caught the wail of trumpet, the movement of men, the far-away echo of Jenny's voice. His lovely, magical Jenny, pearl before swine; the thought poisoned him, and with it he crawled back into bed and tried to think what he could do to stop her. She loved an audience. When she found one, he would lose her. Lose her? He had never had her, but he would lose the sight and the sound of her, and that was unbearable. All right, what did Jenny really want? He had offered her better than the mission; she had refused. What could he give her now? She deserved travelling in high places with the adulation of her peers. If he could provide that, would she stay? Would she be grateful? He remembered that all his life he had wanted to be somebody. Oh, he'd been born somebody, but he couldn't succeed in spite of his name.

With Jenny it was different. She was born nobody, but she had it in herself to match any Wyatt, anywhere. The time had come to prove it. He could go to his family and plead with them; he would beg and prostrate himself

before them, for Jenny's sake. He gritted his teeth on a bad taste; the idea of going home was a nightmare. He'd been there only once since his wedding. Christmas Eve a year ago he had joined the carollers and bell ringers on the Hill and arrived at his own spruce-wreathed doorway. Through its fan-shaped windows, light had invited him, and he had entered, mingling with strangers, sniffing pungent balsam and eggnog, dismayed that everything remained so much the same and yet was so foreign to him. Across the room he spied his regal mother and heard his father graciously recognizing newcomers. He turned and fled into the crisp air and never returned.

But for Jenny he would go back there. "Jenny, Jenny," he moaned, "you're the only lovely thing I ever had." He hated knowing that right now she was exhibiting her beauty before all those wretched creatures. "Jenny Angel, Angel." He wanted her then. Yet later, at the approach of her light steps, he hid his face in the pillow and pretended sleep.

In the morning Mollie told him about the service. Her dust cap awry, her face stained with leftover ecstasy, she poked at the bed with her mop. He couldn't escape her.

"I never saw anything like it, Mr. Ken. Those old boys, they were some surprised! And Jenny Angel up there. When she says there's a storm and wind and waves and the like, why, there is a storm. She's Peter himself. You know what I mean, Mr. Ken? She's gifted by the Lord, like I always said. We got a precious thing here. She puts a hand on those bums' heads and says, 'You're forgiven,' and it's like lightning striking, like God coming. See what I mean, Mr. Ken?"

"You know what I see? A bunch of men ogling a damn

beautiful woman. Even bums can see her face and figure. What else did you expect, in God's name?" He blew his nose vigorously.

Shocked, Mollie backed away. "It wasn't like that, at all. You just don't know, Mr. Ken. It wasn't nasty. It was beautiful!"

Kendall Wyatt winced. "Tell Jenny she's not to do it again. Tell her I said she must not."

From the door Mollie warned him: "But she will. The Lord speaks louder than you do. She'll do it."

And Jenny Angel did. Four times, while Kendall Wyatt wore off his fever, she spoke. The handful of men swelled until Dolan had to close the doors early. Then, on the fifth day, Kendall came downstairs. Jenny was rehearsing in Mollie's room. At sight of him she cried out, "You should be in bed."

"I had to put a stop to your show." He told her flatly.

"Oh?" Wearing scarlet, she seemed afire in the drab room, too brilliant for his eyes and understanding. Yet she spoke to him almost gently. "After they've heard me, they won't like you."

He recognized an acid truth. After Jenny Angel, what was he? Pain pinched the nape of his neck; his jaws ground together. "Even so, I'm doing it to-night." He stalked out.

In the ragged men crowding the front seats, Kendall Wyatt sensed an unprecedented eagerness that unmanned him. Uneasily he looked around. Mollie stood in the hallway with foreboding in her face. Jenny was behind her. Despairingly, he wished they at least would go away. In a dry monotone he began to read, comprehending neither words nor meanings, stubbornly keeping on until he became aware of heels hammering on the floor and an

alien muttering, "No—no—no." He raised his eyes. They yelled at him. "We want the Angel, the Angel in Red, the Scarlet Angel." He longed for escape or a hiding place. There was none. Hate was all about him, in the savage faces, the beating heels, the chant. But he would not give them Jenny. He closed the Bible with a slam. "The service is over," he barked. "Get out."

Defiantly they answered, "We want Jenny Angel."

"I said it's over. Get out. All of you." He strode down from the pulpit and past the hooting, jeering men, past Mollie, past Jenny. He didn't stop, but he knew that she was smiling and that the smile was mocking him, at last, mocking him. Locking the door into the bathroom, he was sick for a long time.

The next day he climbed the Hill.

A spate of snowflakes wet his forehead, crept down his neck, increasing the coldness that was always in him now. Heavily he plodded up over broken brick, past peeling paint, until he arrived at the colony of austere pink mansions that breasted blue and yellow fluted doors and outsized brass knockers like so many medals of honour. There, at the top of the hill, he halted in a street that pitched steeply down past pink brick after pink brick to the Charles, which flowed blackly between snow-covered shores. Beyond the river the chimneys and factories of Cambridge exhaled smoke into the lowering sky, but up here quietness enrobed the city. Only a pair of purple pigeons, nesting in a cornice, mournfully intoned his homecoming. He raised the knocker.

An expressionless maid, stranger to him, answered. When he informed her he was a son of the household and wished to see his mother, she vanished soundlessly down

the rust-carpeted hall. He took off his coat and hung it irreverently on the polished banister; he pawed at the intricate Italian wall tapestry of a faded Adam and Eve in Eden; he fingered the brass-potted rubber plant. He toyed with these symbols of home like a child fondling forbidden glass—a last gesture of independence. He was growing colder and weaker in the knees when the maid returned. "Follow me."

As he complied, the house began to overwhelm him. Its prideful elegance, its staid and musty air of long established wealth seemed to reject him, so that when he emerged into his mother's presence, he felt suitably small and shrunken and humble.

Perched on a high-back, green damask chair, her white hair in a queenly coronet, his mother greeted him with supreme courtesy. She extended delicate hands. "It's been a long time, Kendall. I think you might have told me you were coming. You pay us so little attention."

He touched the tips of her fingers with utmost formality and drew away toward the kindled logs in the marble fireplace.

"Are you chilly? Here, we'll have tea. You were always chilly, Kendall."

Wordless, he nodded. Yes, he had always been chill. The birch bark snapped. The blue and gold French clock tinkled off the quarter-hour. His mother's hands were busy with the silver tea things. He made himself inspect the room, its spindle-legged furniture, its sombre hangings, its gilt-framed, frock-coated ancestors. He thought, almost gladly, that Jenny's presence here would pale all these into the archaic antiques they really were.

"Feeling better?" His mother proffered him a teacup.

"Yes." Dutifully he inquired after the family, secretly

numbering them one by one on his fingers. When the last cousin had been named he hesitated.

She asked directly: "Why have you come now, Kendall, after so long? Do you want something?"

"Yes." He licked his pale lips. "I—I want to bring my wife here. I want Jenny to come into this family. I . . ." He cleared his throat, dropped his napkin, retrieved it, swirled the tea leaves in his cup.

"Don't fuss with things. You always fussed. Just say it, Kendall."

But he never could do that. He tried. "I wanted you to meet Jenny. I—I thought if there were a family affair and I could bring her . . . She—she's very beautiful."

His mother's eyes questioned sharply, but she managed patiently: "Why now? You might have come a year or two ago."

He couldn't answer. He bent nearer the fire, away from those cool blue eyes. From childhood he remembered those eyes, probing, sometimes accusing, sometimes frightening. He tried again. "Will you ask us?"

"This is all very peculiar," she sighed; "but then, you were always odd. Well, we'll see. Your father's birthday is next week. We're having your brothers and their wives. I don't know. We'll see."

"Please, Mother."

She flushed slightly when he turned toward her, obviously straining to subdue his emotions. "Really," she complained, "that is a frightful suit you are wearing."

"I'm sorry. It didn't seem to matter down there. I'll get a new one."

"I'll have to think a moment, Kendall. Why don't you go up to your old room and visit? When you come down I'll tell you."

For a half-hour he numbly noted the snow patterns on the bare elms, the city roofs, the State House dome. He had hated this house, these people, and himself most of all, but he had not hated this room. It had been his refuge. No one ever bothered him here. He had no refuge now, and Jenny bothered him everywhere. He drugged his senses with Jenny until he could go down and confront his mother.

"Well, Kendall, it was good of you to come. And we will see you again, Thursday next." She added precisely, "You and your wife. And do buy a new suit." Her kiss was a peck on his chin.

"Thank yo' n. Give the others my—my regards. We'll come."

He went out, and all the rest of the afternoon he paced up and down the crooked Hill streets, wondering why he was ill with disappointment at getting what he had asked for.

Chapter seven

JENNY perched on her bed, feet curled under her, arms locked behind her head, eyes stretched and intent with her thinking. When Jerry plucked at her skirts she ordered him crossly away. When he banged her knees with demanding fists she slapped his wrist. When, finally, he howled she pushed him down amid his blocks and wished that Mollie would come and remove him. She wanted to think. She had a lot to think about: how to achieve the audience she craved, how to fulfill the role Mollie promised for her. This week had proved she could hold even a group of derelicts. What couldn't she do preaching to hundreds, maybe thousands, showing them her magic, guaranteeing them a mystical friendship to replace loneliness, an ecstasy instead of boredom, an excuse for poverty? And they would pay for it, too—a little at a time perhaps, but she would make it more fun to give to her than to give to God; and, the way they figured it, it would seem to be the same thing. "Come to Jesus. Come to me," she whispered. She would be somebody then, up there in front of thousands, adored and independent with no need for Ken at all.

She would quit this mission and go—— But how? She wished that she could pray and get an answer on what to do next, like Mollie; but it was no use—the Lord never spoke to her when she was alone. Maybe though, she decided, if she let her imagination and her mind race together and blend, something might occur to her and she would know. Yes, she would preach. When? Next Thursday, because that was Abner Holtz's time, and the crowd would be there, primed. When he called them up, she would come, and then she would talk to them, tell them—tell them . . . She was on her feet again, roaming back and forth, hands pressed against her breasts, eyes, seeing beyond the room. She would give them what they wanted, lots of sin, more lurid than their own, straight out of the Bible, an oriental feast, an armless hand writing on the wall. They would see the fruited tables, the lewd dancing girls; they would hear stringed lutes and weird words. They would love it; they would love her also.

Jerry began to whimper. Absently she picked him up and kept on walking and planning until she heard Ken's step. In an instant her happiness disappeared.

"Well?" she demanded.

Ken stopped beside her, scattering snow from his coat, wringing his hands. "I've been up there. Up home."

"I don't know what you're talking about."

"My family, up on the Hill. I mean they're somebody. Jenny, they want us to come up. They——"

"Really, Ken, after all this time, why bother?" In his bedraggled coat with that strange glint in his eyes, he appeared shabbier, uglier than ever. Still carrying Jerry, she began to pace again, to hide her disdain.

Doggedly he trailed her. "You'd like it there. I'll buy you a new gown, and you'll outshine everything. You're

so beautiful. You belong with fine things. You——”
Alarmed, Jenny brought the child between them.

“It’s a family party next Thursday. You’d have a new gown, shoes, anything.” He was not above bribing her.
“A dinner party.”

“A dinner party,” she repeated, “next Thursday.” Then suddenly she knew she could use that. She could go into the Holtz meeting in the new gown and say, “I have just come from dining with the rich at their very tables. It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to get into heaven.” They who were not rich—they would love that. Only the humble fear the Lord. Very effective. Abruptly she smiled. “All right, Ken, we’ll go.”

He seized her free hand between moist fingers. “You’ll be glad, Jenny. You’ll see.”

When they reached the yellow door of the brick house on the square it was snowing again, thick flakes that be-jewelled Jenny’s hair and slid down Ken’s coat collar. At their appearance the buzz in the living-room subsided; the family turned its collective gaze on Jenny. Mother Wyatt, haughty in black, was polite and proper. “Good evening. We are glad to meet you at last.” The daughters-in-law took the cue. “How do you do?” Father and brothers, resplendent in overstuffed shirt fronts and already cheered by bootleg cocktails, were almost hearty. “Well, at last!” Completely at ease, Jenny responded, smiling, conscious of her own loveliness, while Kendall silently thanked God that he had rehearsed and rehearsed this scene in his mind until every action and word rolled out of him as mechanically perfect as an etiquette book.

“My Lord, Ken, where did you get her?” demanded

Henry, the older brother, fat now so that his coat buttons were taxed to popping, and getting bald.

Ken couldn't reply, but Jenny did, gaily: "Oh, I just blew in off the street, out of the slums. You know at the mission we throw out the lifeline, rescue the perishing—or maybe you wouldn't know."

As the brothers edged nearer he moved away, envying them as always but, perversely, a little smug just now. He had something they liked, a beautiful woman, soft, dynamic, his wife. His wife? That was a joke, but they didn't know it. At table none could keep his eyes long from her. Ken was proud of that and laughed at them, but then he looked at her himself and knew that she did not belong here. She was too alive, too vivid. Somehow she was a reproach to the fine antiques and the living products of genealogy. As the dinner progressed he ate little. His head began to ache, his ears to burn. The hour stretched endlessly before his mother announced coffee in the drawing-room.

Alluring in her simple scarlet sheath, Jenny chose a low stool by the fire. The flames danced in her dress, and her dress in the flames, until only her fine-boned face was real, composed, idly observing the room and its people. The daughters-in-law studied her obliquely and chattered of their children, the Wyatt grandchildren, as though they could thereby regain stature in the wandering eyes of their husbands. Jenny thought: Why, he's never told them about Jerry! What if I did now? But Jerry's mine, not his. And she held on to her bombshell, permitting Mother Wyatt to steer the conversation into harmless channels. Not until the French clock belled nine did Jenny remember the Holtz meeting, flourishing by now. She must not miss it.

She exclaimed urgently, "Ken, we do have to go."

Despite his own torment at being with his relatives, Ken didn't want to take Jenny away from them. He wanted to stay longer so that they might continue to see what the least of them had achieved. He heard himself answering her, "Not yet, Jenny."

"But the meeting at the mission."

"Holtz doesn't need us. He'll roar without us. Forget it."

"No, I have to be there." She rose resolutely.

"Wait a second," Henry interposed. "What is this? You've just come. You can't leave now!"

She explained to Henry, her mouth quirked at the corners between a smile and a taunt. "There's a special meeting to-night. After all, the mission is Ken's job, you know. We should be there."

"I don't see why."

She turned full toward him. "To some people this is important. It can change lives. You know, Mr. Wyatt, people repent and are forgiven. Have you been saved?"

Henry gagged. Ken closed his smarting lids. He didn't know whether she was joking or not; he didn't care. Henry decided it was a joke and began to guffaw. "Saved? Well, we don't need to be saved. Why, St. Peter himself will come to greet us!" Behind him the others laughed doubtfully.

"Oh? Well, perhaps." Jenny went to Mother Wyatt, meeting the woman's cool disapproval steadily. "Good evening. And thank you for inviting us." She bowed briefly to the others and departed.

Kendall followed. While they waited for a cab, he asked, "Why did you say, 'Have you been saved?' My Lord!"

"I don't know. We use it so much. It seemed sort of crazily appropriate. Besides," she added blithely, "it's a good question."

"No, Jenny, no." Talking distressed him. "They could do so much for you. Clubs, parties. They could make you somebody."

She measured him coolly. "Maybe. I thought so once. But when will you learn I can be somebody by myself? I don't need your stuffed shirts. Moreover, they bore me, and they are ashamed of you. It stands out all over them."

"I know. I know. I don't matter. You do."

"Oh, for heaven's sake!"

At the mission, Jenny bolted into the office and down the hall until Mollie's bulk blocked it. Looking past Mollie with narrowed eyes, she tested the spirit of the meeting. A large crowd, all warmed up. Holtz was in rare form. Good! She spotted Rudy crouched beyond the upright piano, his trumpet between his bony hands, his black fingers tootling silently, waiting as she had instructed him. As Holtz issued his invitation and charged down into the aisle, Jenny signalled Rudy, dropped her cloak on Mollie's lap, and swept dramatically out on to the platform. Rudy's trumpet sang out softly, three notes, wistful yet imperative. The audience grew mute listening for the sound, not quite certain it had come. Rudy blew again, louder. The notes rippled clear, up and down the scale, then repeated, rising, offering up Jenny. When the crowd saw her, they gave a deep, delighted sigh.

She began talking quietly, "Surely the Lord is with us to-night."

"Amen." They agreed eagerly.

"He told me to come here and tell you what you must do. Have you repented your sins? Have you come to Jesus?" Her questions imitated Holtz, but seemed different, more than human. "I have just come from a feast up there on the Hill where they feed their dogs better

than you can feed your children. But they are not saved. I asked them. And do you know what they did?" The poor, the downtrodden, the beaten wriggled expectantly. "They laughed! And the Lord, He was tired of them, and He told me to come here to you and make you His children. Will you listen?"

"Yes, Angel. Yes, Angel."

"It's like the Bible, the word of God."

"Praise the Lord."

"Listen." For them Jenny fashioned the feast. They saw the laden tables and the dancing girls. Softly, strangely, Rudy's trumpet prescribed a disturbing oriental tune and died away. Jenny flung out one hand. They read the warning of doom on their smutty walls. "And will you repent and be saved?" Back and forth along the apron of the platform she moved, her body lithe, enticing, her voice and heart desiring them to yield to her. "Come to Jesus. And if you cannot come to Him now as you are, come to me, Oh, sinner, come!" Mollie screamed in her hysteria; Holtz stamped his foot in anger. The crowd did not hear. They heard no one, saw no one except Jenny Angel. She called to them again: "Come to God. Come to Jesus. Come to me." Stumbling, bewildered, they came.

From the rear vestry Kendall Wyatt witnessed the performance and knew he had completely lost Jenny now—he could give her nothing comparable to the worship of that audience; and, like an injured child, he wanted to cry. He dabbed at his watering eyes, swallowed the lump in his throat. Turning to retreat, he bumped into Dolan. Plainly, Dolan too was upset: he stared unblinking at Jenny; his mouth jerked, his skin was livid. Ken thought bitterly: He's drunk, and so am I. We're all drunk with Jenny Angel, damn it. God damn it!

Jenny repeated her invitation, "Come." Several men pushed down the middle aisle, some shouting, some silent, some shaking. Dolan shuddered and lurched into them. His mumbling became distinct: "I killed that woman. God forgive me, I killed her." Like a sleepwalker he swayed forward, shoving past the rest to reach Jenny first. He seized her hands and fell to his knees. "I killed her. God forgive me. Angel, tell God to forgive me." Everyone heard and gasped. Jenny looked down at Dolan's tortured body and remembered him in his kitchen, remembered the death on Dolan's soul. With pity she said, "There is forgiveness, if you truly repent."

Dolan cried out, "I want you to forgive me—now."

"Hush!" She placed a hand across his mouth. "Hush, Dolan. God will forgive you."

The huge hands clung to her. "I confess to murder. I call on all here as witnesses. You forgive me, Jenny Angel?"

"It's all right, Dolan. It's all right."

She touched his bent head and tried to draw away. Murder was beyond her forgiving. She needed help. Below her Abner Holtz still stood stunned. She spoke to him. "Are you going to stay there and let these souls go away? Come and help me."

Dolan grabbed at her skirt again. "Save me, Angel."

"Please, Dolan." Her mouth was dry, her bones were turning into liquid. "God forgives you. I told you. Rise now."

He stumbled up, "Angel, Angel!" Then Rudy appeared; strong black hands took Dolan's arms and led him away. Abner Holtz pronounced a hurried benediction. Jenny felt empty, like a wine bottle spilled of its last warm drop.

Chapter eight

THE morning papers headlined: "Murderer Confesses to Scarlet Angel at Mission. Dramatic repentance at hands of beautiful woman preacher brings in long-sought killer." Police arrived and took Dolan, stupefied and docile. Photographers descended like a swarm of starlings and posed Jenny in the pulpit, in her flame dress, with Mollie, with Jerry. All day long the religious fanatics, the merely curious, the customary bums, the avid newsmen, filed in and out before Kendall Wyatt's desk. With the disinterest of an onlooker at a parade, he watched them, wondering vaguely at their number, their variety, their ceaseless questions. He came alive only when he saw Jenny. Then his aliveness was an exquisite, nettling pain, for he saw that she was enraptured by the publicity, the praise, the celebration of her powers, the pictures.

When Mollie crowed victoriously, "You see, Angel—I told you—the Lord has spoken!" Jenny tossed her head and flung out her arms in sheer exultation. "Praise the Lord, Moll, by all means praise the Lord!"

Two days later the letter arrived from a small Pennsylvania city. The people there were planning, it said, a series of revival meetings. They wanted someone different,

colourful, effective, maybe even daring. They had read about Boston. Could she come to them? Could she lead their city back to Christ as she had led the killer? They promised her the biggest church in town, publicity, and a portion of the collections. Would she come?

There was no question. Jenny went. So did Mollie and Jerry, and Kendall Wyatt although he didn't know why—bewitched perhaps by some idiotic hope that it was better to be near her than never to see her at all. They drove down in the red Ford which Jenny impulsively bought and learned to drive within the week. On the first night they stayed at a cheap hotel, thereafter at the best, because Jenny decided that made better publicity. Ken dutifully paid the bills and cursed himself for being a fool.

They arrived in the city four days early. At once Jenny melted into a throng of local dignitaries, preachers, and reporters. She exerted her charm, her warmth, her excitement, and they succumbed. She was briefed by a dazed police department on local crime. She was interviewed and photographed. She addressed a high-school rally, the women's club, the leading businessmen's club. On the eve of the first meeting, she invaded the movie house and appeared on the spotlighted stage between reels, almost ethereal in her flowing red gown, to ask the astounded patrons: "Have you found Jesus? Have your sins been forgiven? Come to-morrow. Come to me." When they recovered, they cheered until she withdrew, trailing her faithful band, the committees, newsmen, Mollie.

The revival was a tremendous success. Jenny swept all before her. Ken read about it in the papers. He would not attend her meetings. Evenings he sat with Jerry and listened as the boy cried himself to sleep, wanting his mother. Days he walked with him in the desolate town

square. Awkwardly, he tried to comfort the child. God knew he wanted Jenny in sight too! But the wanting was no use for either father or son. He tried to tell Jerry how it was with them and Jenny:

"We're excess baggage, boy, you and I. We can be chucked overboard if we're in the way. We might as well get used to it. Your mother—she isn't like anybody else. Jerry, she's—she's—I don't know what she is. Anyhow it hurts us, Jerry, but there's nothing we can do about it. Nothing."

Bleakly he put the boy down on a scrap of brown ground next to the park bench, and unfolded the newspaper to the headlines on last night's meeting: "Beautiful Woman Preaches. Hundreds of Converts." He tore the paper in strips and dropped them one by one into a rubbish barrel. He hated this town. He hated himself. He hated the whole world and the God that made it. Sometimes he even hated the child because at least he looked like Jenny, proof of her flesh while he, Ken, was nothing. He couldn't stand being nothing any longer. He remembered the mission and knew in that instant that he must go back.

Although the pale sun had not yet set, he took Jerry's hand and led him firmly back to the hotel. Jenny was sitting behind a desk tumbled with papers, fan letters, and posters. She scowled when they came in.

"Really," she began brusquely, "I'm very busy. Can't you keep him out longer? Mollie isn't in, and it's early yet."

Jerry broke away from Ken to fling his small, hard body against his mother. She held him off.

"Oh, hush up! You do fuss. Please, Ken, take him away."

Kendall replied stoically: "I can't. I'm leaving."

"Oh? Why?"

"Why!" For a dreadful moment he wanted to tell her why: that all his life he had failed to compete against men, and he would be damned if he could take on God. He leaned toward her, his mouth wry. "They sent for me at the Lighthouse," he lied. "They can't find anyone else to do my work free. That's all."

"Oh? Well, that's too bad. But, look, can't you take Jerry just until Mollie comes? I've got to check this material for the papers." Jerry was trying to scramble on to her lap. "Please, Ken."

"No. He wants his mother." Ken edged toward the door. "I must go now."

"But—" The telephone jangled. She reached for it with one hand and pushed Jerry on to the floor with the other. He stayed heaped against a chair leg, one fist rebelliously thumping on his mother's shoe, dark eyes wide and forlorn.

"Yes," Jenny said into the phone. "This is Jenny Angel speaking. . . . Chicago?" She sat bolt upright. "Yes." Her eyes glowed. "You want me out there? How soon? . . . Oh, yes, I can. Indeed, I—"

Ken walked out, shutting Jenny behind him. In the lobby he met Mollie with a batch of new posters.

"Oh, wait a minute, Mr. Ken."

But he said: "Goodbye, Mollie," and kept on going.

He arrived at the mission in the middle of the next afternoon. Rudy, who was occupying his desk, feet up, head tilted, lips on the trumpet, came to attention at sight of Ken; but Ken ignored him and went on up the stairs. For an hour he sat motionless on the side of the bed. The whole place was ghastly without Jenny. It smelled of death and despair. Funny, he had never noticed that before.

Maybe it should be aired out. Could you air out despair? He ought to speak to Rudy about that. Mechanically he rose and wandered downstairs; but Rudy had gone. He walked out into the darkened street, across the cobbled alley, three doors down to the right. He told the cold eyes that surveyed him through a slit in the door: "Friend of one-eyed Dolan's." Noiselessly the door opened and swallowed him. Three days later Rudy found him there and brought him home and nursed him with compassion, for, after all, Kendall Wyatt was really one of them now.

Book two

Chapter one

FROM an office fifteen stories high, Sam Wilcox peered drearily down at the undulating umbrellas and the swimming streets. Slouched so, his big body limp, his forehead throbbing against the cool glass, he hated the wet grey city and all its aimless people. He hated also the room behind him, the thick-carpeted, high-polished office, symbol of his success. But most of all he detested the day itself because it was his wedding anniversary and therefore the one time in the year when he did exactly what Martha wanted. And Martha, Heaven help him, was in the throes of her latest fantastic fad, Religion. Not a polite Presbyterianism nor a socially acceptable Episcopalianism, but a soul-saving, washed-in-the-blood-of-the-lamb sort of thing.

His hands twitched restlessly through his pockets seeking a match. Instead he extracted a rumpled blue leaflet which Martha, half apologetic, half determined, had presented to him over the breakfast eggs.

"This will be good for you, Sam. You've got to be saved. Here's where we're going to-night."

He spread the leaflet flat against the window and read again:

JENNY ANGEL

Are you lonely? Are you frightened?

Are you failing? Are you lost?

COME AND BE SAVED

both here and hereafter

THE SCARLET ANGEL calls you:

"Come to Jesus. Come to me. Come."

THE ARENA

All this week. 8.30 p.m.

Sam snorted. Wait until he showed this to the boys at lunch! They'd get a king-sized boot out of him, Sam, the big boss, at a revival. When the roll is called up yonder he'll be there! He began to laugh mirthlessly.

Well, he owed Martha that much. After all, it was her father's drugstore and her money that had set him up in his business. Of course he had devoted twenty years to out-guessing, outsmarting, outworking all friends and all enemies indiscriminately to build the present multimillion-dollar Wilcox Drug Company. But he had loved that—the long scramble, the clawing, scrapping, bluffing, climbing. That was exhilarating, something to wake up for every sunrise. Marrying Martha had started it, so she deserved one night of celebration. But, good God, Martha's notion of celebrating!

Sam swung clumsily around to his desk chair. Gingerly he massaged his aching temples. Too much liquor last night and the nights before. Too little sleep. Too much emptiness. Alongside the inkwell paraded sample bottles of Wilcox pink headache tablets guaranteed to cure all headaches save his. He swallowed a couple anyway, then let his mind mope around in its misery. He was like a man, he thought, who had dedicated his whole life to hunting

down the rainbow's end and, now that he had found the pot of gold, didn't give a damn. Why? Because now he had lost a goal, and there was nowhere else to go and no one to give the coin to—at least no one that mattered. Oh, Martha of course, and his daughter Carol, who wintered in an eastern school and summered in a western camp, whose acquaintance with him was limited to his cheque book. Well, maybe it was his fault; but he didn't have time for a child. Those were the all-absorbing, growing years of the beloved business, the prime fighting years for the magnificent organization that ran like clockwork now and demanded little of him save his signature. He selected a gold-tipped, black pen and focused dimly on the pile of papers at his right. Jenny Angel's words floated before his burning eyes: "Are you lonely? Are you lost?" God, yes! So what? So what?

Sam swore softly and began footing a dozen letters with his name.

At lunch he tried to make a joke of his fate. To his dismay the other men downed their coffee with solemn tales of Jenny Angel's exploits over the last five years. Hypnotic, they had heard she was, beautiful and uncommonly lucky. Like that time upcountry when the drought was ruining the crops, and she sailed into this big camp mceting and passed out umbrellas and rubbers and prayed for rain—and damned if it didn't! Just like that! The whole place was saved. And that time when the killer confessed to her in public. And that face and that figure. Ah-h! "You won't be bored, Sammy, not bored," they said, winking.

Unbelieving, Sam went home and took Martha out to dinner and ate chicken Melba and drank smuggled champagne and was sick to his stomach. Scarlet Angel, my God!

Arriving late at the Arena, he plunged into the mob with Martha plucking at his coat. Through the poster-bright lobby, up the thronged stairs to the balcony, he shoved until he grabbed two seats obviously intended for someone else.

Thousands of people were already here. Thousands more were trying to get in. The air was fetid with damp wool and steamy bodies, humming with a hundred human noises. Sam gritted his teeth and nursed his hurting head, and wished mightily he were somewhere else.

Then, suddenly, the organ paused, and stillness—expectant, vibrant stillness—electrified the audience. Sam opened his eyes. Directly beneath him a black boy rose, tall on his toes, rocking slightly, head tilted, trumpet glittering in the spotlight. He blew. The instrument sang tenderly, sweetly yet imperiously announcing, promising. And she came. Jenny Angel walked on to the platform. Slim and vivid in silken white with red roses in her arms, she moved with dramatic grace. She spoke, low yet full-throated, reaching out, gathering them all in, the would-be saints and the willing sinners. Her eyes traced the balcony and touched the soul of each person there. Her look met Sam's and seemed to lock an instant. Sam awoke. He caught and recorded her every curve and colour; he took in the tonal texture of her music. He never could tell exactly what she said or did that night; but what she was pierced him. He had an idiotic desire to touch her, not lustfully as he caressed the golden girls for a price, nor dutifully as he had once held Martha, but with adoration and reverence. For an hour he sat unmoving, tense, tingling with strange emotions. He didn't know what had happened to him. He didn't much care. All he knew was that now he was alive again. No boredom. No bitterness.

When Jenny Angel called, "Come to Jesus—come to me—come," he knew he would see her again.

His jubilation betrayed him so that Martha exclaimed: "Oh, Sam, you do believe! Sam, listen, she's calling you to go and be saved. Sam, please go. Please."

Jenny's voice was urgent. "Come to me. Come." Sam was wondering, God help him, wondering. Should he answer? Now? Here? Should he go?

Martha's damp hand stroking his wrist tossed him back into reality. He sprang up. "Let's get out of here." And he stomped out with Martha in teary protest.

But Sam could not forget. All night he saw the dark eyes probing his, the slim hands beckoning, "Come." He had to answer. In the morning he lingered at the office only long enough to arrange a free day. Then, whistling airily as he had not whistled in years, he strode ten blocks in the city traffic and the pale sunshine to Jenny Angel's hotel.

In the blue and white elegance of the Hotel Michigan's finest suite Jenny Angel luxuriated—in one hand a fragile cup of steaming coffee, in the other the morning paper front-paging a handsome photograph of herself at the Arena. Reading the piece, she smiled. Colourful but not offensive. The best she could expect. By and large the press was good to her. She co-operated with the newsmen freely, posed tirelessly for pictures and tossed tidbits their way. Her careful respect of them, generally speaking, had paid off. If they pried too far into her personal affairs she would explain with disarming frankness: "But look, I'm nothing myself—just a tool, just a machine through which the Lord speaks. I'm God's salesgirl, and of course it's the product that counts." They grinned at that and quoted her liberally.

A few of the reporters still ridiculed her, and toward them her temper blazed. Mollie cautioned her with Scripture: "Bless them that persecute you, Jen. Forgive them—they know not what they do, like Jesus said." Jenny neither blessed nor forgave them; but, for the time being, she ignored her enemies and multiplied her friends and followers.

After five years she had hordes of these. Wherever she travelled, in backwoods meetinghouses, big tents, open-air revivals, magnificent city churches, wherever she called "Come," the crowds adored her. She gave them what they wanted. With uncanny showmanship and shrewd imagination she put on the best, the gaudiest show in town. They loved it, and everybody was happy. Even the collection plates demonstrated that it was becoming fun to give to the Lord through the Scarlet Angel. And Jenny prospered until she didn't know quite how much money she did have. Anyway it was enough for her always to get the best. She saw to that. How else should one treat an emissary of the Lord than with the best?

Now she smiled at the shining room and rubbed her palms across the embroidered silk of her house coat. The feel of rich things, the touch of comfort was sweet to her fingers. Five years, but the feel of comfort was always new and good. Ah, life was kind to her! She gave it everything she had, but it returned to her double.

Yet when she shut her eyes and rested her head against the chair back the smile faded. Gradually she became aware of the silence, the aloneness. Uneasily she shouted for Mollie; but Mollie must have taken Jerry out to the park. He needed it, poor boy, cooped up with a pair of journeying women. Anyway, she should have been told. Except when she was working, which was most of the

time, she couldn't endure being all alone. Mollie knew that.

Perspiration beaded her hairline. Moist hands dug into the upholstery, clinging to its solidity. For when she was alone there was, sometimes, too much emptiness. "The room, the hotel, the whole world held nothing, nothing at all. Quivering, Jenny recalled the day she had discovered this.

She had been on the coast then, and because she had a cold and was exhausted she had consented to one day's rest. She went alone to the beach and remained alone, flat on her back with the sun on her face, her shoulders buried in the sand. At low tide the ocean was pungent with fish and seaweed and salt wind. The only sounds were the murmuring of waves and the mewing of gulls. Jenny Angel stared up and up into the sky, up and up beyond blueness, splitting the clouds apart. The depth, the height of the sky's emptiness overcame her. There was nothing there. Absolutely, completely nothing, no glimpse of heaven nor of Him she talked about so much and so profitably. No sign at all. Only nothingness, pale and incredibly endless. She ached with the abrupt knowledge of this. The old loneliness pinched her heart until she was gasping. Like the sky, the sea and the sand offered nothing. There was nothing waiting—see, Jenny? Nothing hovering, nothing loving—see, Angel? No God and, if no God, no Jesus. If no Jesus, what of Jenny Angel? Sand drifted across her legs. Sea gulls circled and dived, spearing their fish. Red sun slid into green sea. Loneliness was a lump in her throat and a wetness behind her lids. If there was nothing, what of Jenny?

Crying out, she snatched up her things and fled home, where Mollie dosed her with hot tea and set to praying

loudly and confidently until, briefly wrapped in Mollie's certainty, she slept in peace. With the morning, however, the knowledge and the loneliness returned, riding her hard until she walked out on to her stage and uttered the familiar phrases, the angry words, the kind words to her people, and they listened and believed her. And after a while, because they believed, she believed, also.

Almost. Except when she was alone like this. Lord, please! Don't be a fool, Jen, there's nothing. Hush! Nothing. Scrambling up, she paced the immaculate room. It was five years ago, according to the newspaper, that Jenny Angel had first hit town. Five years! "This is her fifth strike at the sin in us. Maybe we're a stubborn people. We don't save easily. But we enjoy having the Scarlet Angel try."

Five years ago. She and Mollie and Jerry had arrived by train that day with only a handful of posters and a few ideas. They had lived cheaply and counted pennies. But on the night she preached, she knew that she had won. There had been a few bleak times since when Mollie washed dishes and Jenny waited table for their dinners, but those were long past. They would never have to go back to the mission, never.

Only twice had she seen Kendall Wyatt since he left. Once after a mass meeting in Boston, when the others had gone and the janitor was slamming up the seats, he had emerged from the shadows and greeted her with a limp hand and a forbidding formality. His eyes gleamed with passion; but she couldn't guess whether it was from admiration or from aversion, and she was vastly relieved and guiltily rueful when he vanished as silently as he had come.

A year later, in Boston again, she had conducted a mass meeting in white-robed dignity and scarlet beauty and

then had waited for Ken; but he was missing. She sought him out at the mission. After all, he had been good to her when there was no one else. She wore her furs and a single red rose as though this symbol of her success could counteract her memories. The neighbourhood was worse than she remembered, dirtier, dingier, cheaper. The mission, with its beacon winking wanly in the daylight, was smaller, drearier. The taxi driver was reluctant to let her out. "A lady shouldn't be in such a spot." And he hung around until she dismissed him sharply. At the window she hesitated, even as she had hesitated that first time, feeling lonely and oddly depressed as if the time between had not been as important as she had thought.

She saw Ken at his desk, his face puffy and brown-spotted with illness, his hands ceaselessly toying with a loose coat button, his eyes closed. He responded slowly at the shutting of the door behind her. His lips parted but made no utterance.

"Ken." It was almost a question.

He replied with great effort. "Why did you come?" He neither rose nor invited her to sit down.

She sat anyway on a straight chair facing him. "I thought I'd like to see the place again, and you," she said directly. "It's been a long time."

He nodded. His eyes were on his hands, which shook so that he locked the fingers over the desk edge.

"We've come a long way." She was trying to be kind.

He agreed. "Some up. Some down. A long way either way."

"Yes." She asked about the men, the mission, himself.

He shrugged. The times were booming, and business in the gutter had slackened off; but the mission would be around awhile. Things would drop again. They always

did. After that he inquired civilly enough about Mollie and the boy.

She told him they were fine, travelling with her, of course, her family. And he didn't point out that he was her family too, legally. He wasn't much of a man for families.

Finally there was nothing more to say. Jenny stood up. "Why don't you come to to-night's meeting?"

He shoved back his chair and lunged upward, balancing against the desk, his eyes level with hers and cold. "When I want a show I go to the theatre."

She winced. "I'm sorry."

"What for?"

She didn't know. For the whole place, the mission, the men. For Ken himself, his smallness, his misery, the implacable bitterness that twisted his features.

"You're sorry! You!" He chuckled thinly. Then, without warning, he asked: "Do you want a divorce?"

She was too startled to reply at once, and he continued as if reading her mind boldly. "No, it would be bad for your business, wouldn't it? Angels don't get divorces."

Pity dissolved into annoyance. "That's right," she said steadily. "I'd rather not get a divorce just now, if you don't mind."

"If I don't mind! Oh, no, I like being husband to the magnificent, the beautiful Scarlet Angel. I—I—" He broke off.

"Look, Ken, we don't have to be enemies."

"No," he agreed softly. "Not even enemies. We don't have to be anything. Not anything."

With her gloved hand Jenny patted his arm and turned and walked away, never to come again.

Head dipped against the wind, she pushed blindly up

the brick sidewalk. A black hand brushed her elbow.
“Mam?”

“Yes?” She stopped. In the shelter of a vacant store front Rudy joined her.

“I saw you a couple of times. You were good. Real good. But you know something? You need me.”

“Oh?”

“The trumpet. Remember? Like the first time. The organ is O.K. but not special. I been thinking. Listen. Can’t you hear the trumpet?”

She cocked her head as though listening. And it was there, clear, sweet, the trumpet calling her that time everything had begun, when Mollie was exalted and Ken angry and the people slovenly, humble, and beaten but loving her. The trumpet for Jenny Angel.

“Yes, Rudy, come, and we’ll try it.”

The mission light winked patiently on behind as she and Rudy moved away. Ken crushed his nose against the stained glass and peered after them, wondering tiredly why Rudy followed the angel and wishing he’d return.

That was three years ago. Rudy had trumpeted her on stage in every performance since.

Jenny Angel sipped at her cold coffee, stretched her legs, and yawned comfortably. The hotel’s impersonal peace and last night’s success were reclaiming her. The aloneness was gone. Mollie and Jerry had returned from the park and were babbling cheerfully together in the next room. They wouldn’t come to her until she sent for them. No one would disturb her until she was ready. That was her rule. With satisfaction she smiled into the round mirror over the mantel. The high-collared, blue-green robe was definitely becoming, she decided pleasantly. Perhaps she should change sometimes from her

ritual white and scarlet. Still, that was her trade-mark, her sign, the Scarlet Angel.

She went close to the mirror and studied her face. It was good to be beautiful. It was also practical. The public liked it. She was duly grateful. With a critical gaze at the corners of her mouth, the arch of her brows, she began slowly to recite, “ ‘What is man that thou art mindful of him? . . . For thou hast made him a little lower than the angels and hast——’ ”

She was interrupted by a knock at the outside door. Startled, she spun about. No one would dare intrude. They had orders at the desk. The knock was repeated, urgently. Frowning, Jenny Angel moved to answer.

Sam Wilcox filled the door. His broad shoulders and great head blocked out the light. His manner was poised and easy as if he were used to being welcome in high places. Seeing her, he was filled with gladness, and his gladness echoed in his quick “Good morning.”

Jenny stepped back. “I told them I was not to be disturbed.”

“I know. That’s what they said. I came anyway.”

“So I see.” His eagerness flattered her.

“I wanted to talk to you. I couldn’t wait.”

“Why?” Jenny began to relent before his enthusiasm.

“It’s important to me. I think to you also.”

“Oh? Look, you might as well come in.”

“Thank you.”

All the way over, Sam had been trying to imagine what she would be like close to, and what he would say to her to avoid seeming the fool he probably was. Shamelessly he regarded her across the length of blue-nubbed carpet. Near to him like this, alone with him, she was even lovelier, even more compelling than she had been last night. And

she was young. Somehow her youngness dismayed him. But her eyes were not young, he thought, as they appraised him coolly now.

"Well," she said, "what is so important?"

"Well—" Yes, well, Sam thought. What is it? That's a good question. For the first time in his life he was acting on sheer impulse. He wasn't used to performing without a blueprint. "Well."

"You must have had some reason for coming. You said so. Besides, you don't look like a loafer."

Then he told her the truth flatly. "I am not bored. I'm alive again."

"I beg your pardon?" She scrutinized his broad face, the tiny lines, the brush of greying hair and beyond, reading inside him, he felt, his dreams, his hopes. But she didn't laugh at him, at the man of his apparent status imitating a moonstruck schoolboy. She didn't pronounce him silly. "So you're not bored."

"No. I—I am Sam Wilcox. I own a drug firm, the Wilcox Drug Company. We make all kinds of pills and medicines. The biggest firm in these parts." He told her this without show of pride, chiefly as an introduction. Nothing else about him seemed to be memorable enough to mention. "I suppose I'm a smart businessman, but it's too easy now. All the hard work is done. I want something different. I'm young yet, and I'm bored—bored with the business, with my family, with myself." He couldn't stop. "There's not much point to things. I don't know. There doesn't seem to be any happiness. No, I don't mean that. I don't need to be happy. Only I was—well, dead somehow. I'm not now." He paused, knowing she listened intently. "Last night I attended your meeting and suddenly, God knows why, I came alive and it felt good. Do you

understand? I thought perhaps you could help. I don't want to lose this. Not again." He was almost pleading with her.

"I don't remember you among those who answered the call," she told him.

"No. It wasn't like that."

"Oh? How was it?"

"I—I don't quite know. I had a notion this morning perhaps I could work for you some way."

"And what could you do for me?" Jenny Angel was baffled. If he really owned the drug firm she couldn't see why on earth he'd need her.

Sam continued steadily. "In a manner of speaking you do quite a business yourself. Collections, gifts, expenses. There must have been thousands there last night. That takes organizing, publicity. I could take care of details while you—you have bigger things to do." He lifted his head. He had found it now. "In other words, I could be your business manager."

Her laugh sparkled pleasantly. "I don't imagine you have the least idea what I do."

Sam leaned forward. "I could get you a whole raft of references about myself. My family has plenty of money anyway. There's only Martha and Carol; they don't need me. Never did. Try me, please."

"Really I—" Jenny stopped. She was tempted. If he really was what he said she could certainly use him. She was getting overwhelmed in details. But for such a big man. . . . Still, as Mollie said, the Lord moved in mysterious ways. "I'll have to think about it," she added straightforwardly, "I'll have to ask Mollie to pray about it. Then we'll decide. . . ." She rose to dismiss him.

Sam wasn't satisfied. To be almost in Eden wasn't enough. "If I—"

At that moment Mollie thrust her troubled face through the door and announced:

"Phone. A Mrs. Hartmann, and she's crying, poor soul."

"What does she want?"

"To see you right now."

"You know I don't see people mornings."

Mollie jerked her head toward Sam. "I know; but he got in, and so I figured—— Aw, Jen, she's all broke up over something. I thought maybe . . ." Mollie allowed her sentence to drift. "Something about her daughter. I couldn't make out. She's still on the phone. She thinks you can fix it. What do I say, Jenny?"

Jenny sighed. People were always thinking she could fix things. She couldn't. She might tell them she would pray for them at the meeting, or they should come and be saved publicly; or perhaps, in extreme cases, she could give them a little money. But she made no pretence of solving personal problems. She didn't even like hearing about them. Individuals wearing grief or shame frightened her. She preferred to ignore this unknown woman. But there was Sam watching and Mollie, beady-eyed, expectant.

In exasperation Jenny clapped her hands together softly. "All right. Send her up. The morning is ruined anyway." Her fear of the one woman in grief had barbed her tongue.

Sam flushed slightly. "Do you want me to leave?"

"No. You might as well see the performance. You'll probably be disappointed."

She was wrong about that.

Chapter two

MRS. HARTMANN entered the room timidly. She was in a neat black suit, and a small round hat was pulled close around her distraught face. Confronted with Jenny Angel, she fidgeted a moment, then said uncertainly: "Miss Angel, this is Margy."

Margy was perhaps fifteen, a child in body but with an ancient, white face and strangely vulnerable eyes. She leaned on her crutches and stared broodingly at Jenny from under black bangs.

The mother explained. "She had an accident three years ago. She can't walk except like this with braces and crutches. She's had several operations, and the doctors say now—they say that she can walk if she wants to. Only she doesn't believe it. She doesn't believe me or them or anything." The words fell dry and hard like pebbles bouncing on glass. "I heard about you. I went last night. You said if we believed in the Lord we could accomplish almost anything. If we had faith." She glanced hopelessly at the unmoving girl. "We haven't anything, Margy and I. But they say she can walk, the best doctors, if she'll believe it. Can you make her believe it?"

"Why me?" Jenny had been listening carefully, wanting

no part of this. The woman was asking her to summon powers she did not have and did not want. She couldn't make anybody walk. The whole idea was too frightening.

"Because you believe in the Lord," Mrs. Hartmann answered. Clearly the pleading was a torture to her.

Mollie had come close in order to nudge Jenny's shoulder. "Because the Lord speaks to you." Sam stood motionless.

Jenny turned to the girl. A child, she thought, scared and defenceless. She doesn't trust me. She knows I can't help her. I know it. And yet.... With slow, deliberate steps she approached Margy and laid a hand on one crutch. The girl's eyes broke away from hers and became riveted on the floor.

"You don't want to be a cripple, Margy?"

The girl shook her head, her mouth tight against quivering. For her this ordeal was worse than the physical pain. That woman, that beautiful—

"Look at me, Margy."

"No."

"Look at me!"

The girl obeyed.

"The doctors say you can walk."

"Yes."

"But you cannot."

"No."

"Margy, your mother told you that I know the Lord God. Would you believe me if I told you He wanted you to walk?"

"I—I—don't know."

Jenny began pacing backwards. She was thinking: I'm as scared as she is. I don't know any more Lord God than she does right now. She could feel Mollie and Sam and the mother watching. She could see the girl, and the flicker of hope in her face. Imagining what it would be like to be

so young and so crippled, Jenny knew that she herself could not have endured the braces, the end of freedom. In the silence of that ordinary hotel room the girl, Margy, became the personification of a broken Jenny. She had to be rescued. Please God.

Holding the girl's eyes with her own, Jenny Angel commanded: "Put down your crutches, Margy. Come here. Come to me." She extended her arms as she did nightly to the crowds. "Come."

Time itself, and life even, were suspended for an awful waiting moment. Down the corridor the elevator squealed to a stop, and some man coughed hackingly.

"Come, Margy." Now no one was there save Jenny and the girl, with Jenny's will bearing powerfully upon the girl. Standing with her back against the printed draperies, Jenny said: "You can come. Just do it. Just walk. Now. Now, Margy. Here."

Margy's fingers uncurled from the crutch, and it thudded against the carpet. The mother covered her stretched mouth with bony hands. Mollie began to sniffle. Margy walked, unsteadily, dizzily but alone. Sam caught her when she fell.

Mollie shrieked: "It's a miracle. As God's witness, it's a miracle."

Jenny was numb. She wanted to be alone. "Don't be silly," she snapped. "The doctors said she could do it."

"A miracle," Mollie chanted. "The Angel has worked a healing. I saw it."

"Hush up, Mollie. No miracle. For God's sake, no!"

Mrs. Hartmann was kissing both her hands frantically. Margy leaned on Sam, dazed and bewildered but with worshipful eyes on Jenny's face.

"It's nothing, really," Jenny pleaded. "The doctors—

Margy just believed it when I told her. That's all. Please."

Sam said quietly: "I'll take care of them, Jenny Angel. You look tired."

"Thanks. I—I . . ." She wheeled about and vanished into her own room, where she flung herself down on the bed, shaking with fright and sudden exhaustion. The girl had walked, sure; but it was not a miracle, not the way Mollie meant, not faith healing, not a Jesus miracle. It could be explained. But who would listen? When the papers got it—when the public heard it... "I didn't do it," she cried aloud. But she knew no one would believe her, not even those who had been here.

By midafternoon the hotel lobby was jammed. The frantic manager tapped petulantly at his set jaw and kept mumbling about calling in the police; but he couldn't quite bring himself to that. They were too pathetic, somehow, that motley crowd that rested on every available piece of furniture, that shuffled across his gleaming floors and crushed against his favourite palms. Half were the physically ailing; the other half were their families and friends, disturbed, eager, disbelieving, waiting. The story of Margy's healing had already snowballed with a thousand tellings. Nobody actually knew or was overly concerned with the truth. The whispers of a wide-winged angel hovering over Jenny at the healing that whisked through the crowd were generally discounted as preposterous an hour later, but the early editions of the press implied that some sort of miracle had happened. Those who believed, those who only wanted to believe, and those who faintly hoped rushed together here at this spot before the shine could wear off. The coming was not easy, and therefore they were stubborn when requested to leave.

Puzzled bellboys walked among them and tried to explain that the lobby was for patrons only, that they would be more comfortable at home. It was futile. They nodded and smiled patiently and went on waiting. What could a healthy, worldly bellboy know about miracles?

Reporters wandered blissfully about, listening to the weird rumours, delighted with the chance at such a story. Everyone looked for Margy and her mother, but they were nowhere. Indeed they were never found again. Overwhelmed, perhaps, by the magnitude of what had happened, they stayed away. Whether Margy continued to walk, no one really knew. It didn't seem to be particularly relevant. A third of the reporters wouldn't believe it anyway—would label it another of Jenny Angel's stunts. The rest could manufacture a gaudier Sunday supplement unhampered by details.

Behind the room-registration desk, alongside the agitated manager, Sam Wilcox regarded the whole scene with rising excitement. Now he was more convinced than ever that he wanted to be with Jenny Angel. For the first time in months he cared deeply about what he was doing. He grinned at the hotel man's discomfort.

"She's got to come talk to them. This can't go on. They're ruining me."

"I'd say you were getting some excellent free publicity," Sam told him unsympathetically.

"So?" The manager's jaw twitched. "This mob? No. They're ruining the furniture and driving off the paying guests. If that woman refuses to come down, I'm calling the police. That's final." He reached for the phone.

Sam decided he meant it. "Wait, let me try." He banged the call bell imperiously, three times, four.

The anxious babble gradually ceased. Pleading faces

turned toward Sam, seeking Jenny Angel, hungry for her, hoping.

Sam, elbows planted squarely on the desk, spoke quietly and with compassion. "Good people, Miss Angel is exhausted. The morning was difficult. Miracles are not easy." They understood that and nodded solemn assent. "It has worn her out. She is, after all, a woman like many of you. Go home now——"

"No, no," they protested.

Sam continued quickly. "Go away now, for she will not come here. But to-night—listen, good people—to-night she will be at the Arena. Go there. She will speak to you. Go home now, but be at the Arena to-night. Jenny Angel will see you there."

Rooted in unanswered waiting, they were slow to stir. A half-dozen struggled up and went out. Others followed, disappointed yet bent on trying again, for maybe the miracle was still true. You never knew.

Gradually the lobby was vacated. The manager almost bounded in his relief. "Well, now, Mr. Wilcox, I do thank you. But we'd better do something about Miss Angel. I don't want this happening again, Heaven knows! Still, she's quite a woman, this Jenny, eh?" He winked and poked at Sam's ribs. "What was this miracle thing she pulled? Do you know?"

Sam was surprised by the intensity of his own anger. He replied frigidly: "The girl walked. I saw her. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm going up to talk with Jenny Angel."

On the tenth floor Jenny was attempting doggedly and fretfully to explain to Mollie why she could not go down and perform more miracles for the waiting crowd: "Please, please, Moll. I can't, I simply cannot go down there and make myself a bigger fool than I already am.

That's all. You were here. You know it was just chance that the girl walked. The doctors—for heaven's sake——” She halted her nervous pacing to pat Mollie's bent head.

Mollie's expression was kindled with that peculiar adoration which Jenny had learned to fear. “I saw her walk,” she stated simply. “I saw. Years ago, Jenny Angel, I saw the Lord's hand when nobody else saw. Now I see the Lord's hand again.” “No.” Jenny gripped her friend's shoulders, shaking her. “No. I have preached and made a good living. And I loved it—the crowds, the work, the way they love me”—she caught her breath and forced out the truth—“and the power over them. I don't want my life changed. See? That's all I'm good for. No. more. I don't want them to see I'm a fake. Everybody would know. Not just you and me. Then there won't be anything.” She finished soberly. “I can't heal.”

Mollie was undismayed. She had heard Jenny belittle her divine powers before, and for the life of her she couldn't figure why she did it. None knew better nor believed more than she that Jenny was God's own chosen one. She sighed hugely. “I told you before. The Lord moves in mysterious ways.”

Jenny knew she was defeated. But how could Mollie, who knew all Jenny's doubts and desires and failings and frequently scolded her for them, go on believing like that? “Let's not talk about it anymore. By the way,” she called as Mollie left the room to see what Jerry was up to, “that Sam Wilcox who was here this morning thinks we need a business manager. Maybe we do. You'd better ask the Lord, Mollie.”

If her voice had a wry edge Mollie never noticed. “I'll do that, Jen,” she answered. “I'll let you know.”

Jenny was caught midway between tears and laughter. Poor Mollie—dear Mollie! But what would she herself be

without her? So Mollie would pray now and report an answer, and it would work. It had happened before when Jenny didn't know what to do. Mollie would pray—not Jenny Angel. Sometimes, as now with this miracle business, she wished she could pray. She was scared. She had so much to lose, and she couldn't expect freaks of luck like the one that had just happened to continue. She began to pace again. Dear Lord, please, Lord! But for her there were no answers. Only silence.

She almost welcomed the knock. Sam entered, tossed his hat casually on to the nearest chair, and beamed at her, apparently content with himself.

"I thought you had gone." She greeted him cautiously.

"No. I haven't left the building. I've been down with the crowd in the lobby."

She frowned. "About this morning, I suppose."

"Yes." He told how he had dispersed the people.

"Until to-night," she pointed out.

"Well, yes, but—"

"And what am I supposed to do then?" Her black eyes searched his face—annoyed, he thought, and a little frightened. Her fear startled him. After all, anyone with the Lord God Himself on her side ought not to be scared.

He remarked dryly: "In my book this religious deal is an unknown factor. I thought maybe you and your Boss would have some ideas, given time. I provided the time."

Jenny reddened slightly. After a long moment she said with unwonted meekness. "We don't have any suggestions. Have you?"

"Maybe." Sam enjoyed having her turn to him like this. "Honestly, I can't fathom why you're so upset. For anybody that lives on the public, this sort of thing ought to be meat and drink. It's terrific publicity."

Jenny walked behind an overstuffed chair and stood with her hands folded on its back as if she were in the pulpit. "In five years of living on the public, as you put it, I've learned a lot. You can fool them only so far. Then they catch on. You're through. Just like that." She snapped her fingers. "I'm not ready to be through. If they think I worked a miracle this morning, they'll expect another and—"

"And?" Sam prompted.

She regarded him coldly. "And I can't. Obviously."

"You could, you know, for the right price in the right places."

She wasn't annoyed. She merely shrugged slightly. "I have too many enemies. Too many nosy papers, too many preachers and others who would love that. It wouldn't work."

"We might have to chance it to-night. Wait a minute, though. Let me call my advertising head and put this to him. He reads the public like a map."

"Not my public. They're different."

"You forget. I'm in the drug business. People who want headache pills and laxatives are probably pretty much the same as the ones who want you. They're sick. Anyway, let's try him. Can I use your phone?"

"Of course." Jenny waved him toward it, and returned to tracing the pink rose on the chair back. They had to be careful. Five years! She couldn't lose her power now to gather the crowds, to hold them, to bring them to their knees or to their feet. She cured them of loneliness because she understood their loneliness and told them so, wistfully and poignantly on stage. She offered forgiveness of sins because she knew their sin too, and demonstrated both the knowledge and the forgiving. She promised hope. She

talked of God and of Jesus, and if the people got a trifle mixed and included Jenny in the Holy Family, why, no one suffered for it. She loved them all, and each one was important to her and felt that fact somehow and was glad that he sat among hundreds like himself, adoring her. That was her power, her joy, her very being, and she could not bear to lose it now. Not now. Not ever.

She clenched her fists and made herself listen to Sam talking into the phone. She noted the greying hairs that brushes his temples and the crooked lines that tugged at the corners of his mouth. She was grateful to him because, right now when she most needed help, someone besides Mollie was taking care of her. Whatever the Lord might tell Mollie, Sam was in as far as Jenny Angel was concerned.

He replaced the receiver and smiled. "Easy, Jenny Angel, easy. Davis thinks I'm crazy, but he'll be here in half an hour. We'll figure it out. As I see it," he jotted in a notebook as he continued, "you feel that this miracle you perf——"

"But I did not perform a miracle."

"This miracle you performed this morning was enough. You expect to be able to do it again some day."

"No."

"You forget," Sam reminded her gently, "I was here. So what you have to do is shift the burden of responsibility from yourself, to—well——" He was embarrassed. "To God. Then if nothing happens, why, it's not your fault. It's His. Or maybe the patient's. Not enough faith. Anyhow, it's out of your hands, see?"

"Yes, I do see." She could feel the fear seeping out, the eagerness filling in.

Sam was smiling at her.

Chapter three

CONTRARY to habit Jenny Angel chose to taxi alone to the Arena. Now that the time was measured in minutes, she was not frightened. She had buried her fears in the sure knowledge that when she, the Scarlet Angel, spoke to her people, they would understand. She would shift responsibility, as Sam suggested, to an unwilling God or an unbelieving patient. Miracle making was not her forte. A little ruefully she wished that she had the bravado to play God to-night, to feel the power and the glory in her hands; but she recognized dynamite when she saw it, and she was not prepared to strike a match.

The cab's brakes groaned to a standstill. The driver, swift and spindly, flew to tend her door. With awed humility he waved aside the fee. "It was an honour, Miss Angel, a great honour."

Jenny nodded a too gracious "Thank you" and climbed out to the milling, surging sidewalk. A small cordon of police charged toward her, setting up a bridge through the floods of people. Acutely conscious of the turning heads and straining necks, she paused once to listen thirstily for the familiar whisperings: "There she is!" "There's the Scarlet Angel." And some girl's voice, thin

and reedy: "Ain't she beautiful! Ma, ain't she beautiful!" She bowed to them all and smiled benignly. This was what she lived for—the crowd, the wonderful, terrifying, adoring, pulsing crowd. She walked slowly between the suddenly quiet lines. She didn't need the police now. Her people would not harm her. They would not lay a hand upon her. To them she was more than human.

In the green dressing room Mollie had already smoothed Jenny's long, flowing gown and scarlet cape and had laid out the white Bible, place marked with a single red rose. The dressing-table lights were turned up, revealing her huddled on a too-tiny stool, her plump face screwed into an intensity which might indicate either joy or woe. Mollie herself couldn't say which. She had been praying as fervently as she had ever prayed, and loudly enough to cause Sam in the dank hall outside, to stop and eavesdrop and chuckle as he passed. She was pointing out to God that things had been fine. And would He please keep them that way? Nobody knew better than she, Mollie Betts, Jenny's faults; but the Lord Himself had elected Jenny, as she herself was witness, and He had responsibilities therefore. So please make it all right to-night. Amen. And please, if He meant Jenny to have special powers, let her know it too, Amen. She was still mumbling prayerfully when Jenny arrived—so beautiful, so serenely composed that she was washed in ecstasy. The Lord sometimes answered promptly. All would be fine.

Mollie brushed Jenny's dark hair and crooned lovingly: "It's going to be all right. I talked with the Lord."

Jenny's eyes were wide and calm, her mouth scarlet and tender. "We've had good years, Mollie. We've done no harm—maybe some good. I don't know."

"God bless you, Jenny Angel." Mollie's voice spiralled

to the high E-string quality that preluded one of her trance-like rejoicings.

Jenny sighed and slipped into her gown. The little dressing room was absolutely still now. Outside, footsteps cracked on the cement. There was a distant hammering and a shout. Then from somewhere, sweet and lonesome, the notes of Rudy's trumpet warming up. Her breath stopped in her throat. The trumpet calling, Come. The scarlet robe draped her shoulders. Mollie chanted: "The Lord bless you, bless you, Angel," as she trotted after Jenny down the dim cement-stained hall, up the narrow stairs, toward the stage.

A workman in faded dungarees turned from pecking behind the curtain and hissed. "God Almighty, such a mob!"

The singing had started, somehow aimless and pleading: "Pass me not, O gentle Saviour," "Lord, speak to me." From the wings Jenny could distinguish the makeshift choir loft where local Baptists in black robes hymned listlessly as though their minds were on other matters. Into the vacant seat at the end of the front row Rudy moved, catlike and swift, his face bent over his shining instrument. Jenny signalled him with a glance, and for an instant his eyes flashed whitely answering her. The trumpet lifted and blew out its first note.

Now was the glory begun: the work of the Lord and of Jenny Angel. Now the trumpet, sweet and lost with hope. Sad, but with hallelujahs. The music floated carelessly off into the bare rafters and was gone.

"Good luck, Angel," Sam whispered behind her. His chest ached with the knowledge of her youth, of her beauty and, God help him, of something he couldn't name, something queenly and commanding, something compassionate

and tender. Divine, maybe? Sam watched as she went to the people, the spotlight framing and following her.

The Arena quavered with an unshed sob: The Angel comes.

Now Jenny was complete. No fear, no loneliness. Only the sweeping sense of power that made her strong and glad. She moved fluidly as she talked to them, tall and ethereal against the pale blue canvas backdrop, small and humble before the stark, towering cross of rough birch. No other props to-night. She talked simply as if she conversed with one alone among them, one whom she loved. She did not deny the possibility of miracles, but she explained exactly what had happened that morning. She spelled it out for them—the heartaches and the pitfalls of miracle working—and laid the responsibility on God's will and the patient's faith. She disclaimed all supernatural powers and reminded them again that she was only God's salesgirl: She could sell the products. She could not make them.

The people's ears noted her words, but their hearts were on her. Beautiful she was but tender. Quiet she was but passionate—lover of all mankind, of them too. If miracles could still be performed in this land of the living, who else than the Angel could be the Doer?

Jenny stopped before the section roped aside for the halt, the blind, all the sick and their attendants. She looked deeply into their faces, masks of sorrow and pain, hope and doubt, and she was shocked. Pity overwhelmed her, leaving her weak and humble for the moment. She drew back, hesitating, and then she thought, Well, they have come to receive a blessing. Let it be so. She had warned them it would do no good, but they wanted it. The least she could do was to offer a dramatic performance. She

held to the original plan and summoned the ushers. They and the nurses and the friends brought the ailing to her, one by one, leading, supporting, carrying, and she touched each one lightly and smiled and said "God bless you." And each passed on as he had come. As the stream moved brokenly, the waiting of the whole auditorium was almost physical. Jenny felt it and numbly wondered if she could go on.

A blind old man, led by an arrogant urchin, tottered before her. She rested her hand on his feeble shoulder. She extracted the necessary words. "May the Lord keep Thee and heal Thee to his service in the name . . ." The gnarled hands fastened on hers. Red wet eyes opened. With a scream the old man tore himself from her. "I can see. I can see. Holy God, it's the truth. Folks, I can see." He stumbled to his knees, kissing her hand with trembling, loose lips.

The audience exploded. People leaped on chairs, shouting, pushing, pummelling one another. The press emptied its section in a dash to corner the old man. Jenny whirled on the boy. "Take him out of here, quickly." The boy obeyed, seizing the man's arm, dragging him away. "Come on, pop. She wants us out. Sure, pop, sure. You can see. Shut up and come on." Jenny didn't even see them disappear.

Shaken briefly out of her poise, she tried to quiet the crowd; but there was no quietness in them. She retreated to the centre stage, pronounced a hasty benediction, signalled the organ into a crashing postlude. Then she ran, ducking the spotlight, her bright cape flying.

Sam caught her, holding her a second. "You were wonderful."

She yanked free. "I'm through, Sam. That horrid old man. That——" She fled.

Sam found her again at the make-up table in her dressing room, pale under the naked bulbs, dressed in street clothes, doing nothing. The white Bible lay in a smudge of powder, and the red rose was limp beside it. In the corner Mollie was hanging up the gown and cape and snuffling on to the back of her hand.

He closed the door behind him. "For heaven's sake! Everything went fine. Nobody's mad or discouraged. What's the matter?"

"That old man. I cured his blindness, he said. I——"

"Yeah. That one. Effective, wasn't it? There's a mob of reporters outside champing at the bit. You'd better go see them."

She made no move. "That man——"

"As for that old man," Sam began uneasily, "I can explain him."

"Sam—you hired him!" She spun round, both hands out-stretched. "Sam, you did. Why didn't you warn me?"

Sam sheepishly admitted the hiring. "After we left, my ad man, Davis, thought it would be bad business to have nothing at all happen to-night, see? All those people expecting it, you know. So he said he'd arrange it. I hope it's O.K.?"

Out of relief Jenny Angel's laughter bubbled and broke lightly. "Oh, Sam! As long as I didn't do it, it's all right."

"You did, too!" Mollie protested stoutly from behind the coat rack. "You cured him. I saw."

"Hush, Mollie," Jenny ordered good-naturedly. "You know, Sam, I was worried."

"Damned if I know why. I should think miracles would be right down your alley."

"I told you. I like things as they are, and I'm not making fool promises when I can't deliver. Nothing makes

the public madder to be hoodwinked where it hurts. It's risky business."

"Even working for the Lord?" Sam was grinning.

"Especially working for the Lord. You'll find out." She rose, throwing her coat over her shoulders. "Now let's go tell those reporters the truth." She slid her hand through his arm.

"Well, not all the truth," he warned. "Just what you said before."

Mollie shouted after them: "Sometimes you don't know what the truth is, Jenny Angel."

Jenny quelled a burst of irritation. Then she said, almost tenderly: "I know, Mollie. Suppose you pray about it."

"Don't you think I won't!" Mollie mumbled, picking up the white Bible and vigorously blowing off the powder.

Outdoors the sky was hazy, the stars washed out above the city's vibrant glow. Brick buildings herded close together, penning in the alley where Jenny stopped and greeted the reporters. They were hostile, Sam thought uncomfortably. They were annoyed and cynical at first; but, for the brief time that Jenny Angel talked to them, they at least listened, aware of the drama and of her beauty. With a sudden shock he realized that they would record anything she said now, as long as it sounded good—and she made it sound good. But afterward—when they discussed it in back rooms and banged it out on typewriters? They would only go along with a gag for a time. Then they would blow it to Kingdom come, and God help Jenny Angel! But she knew it. She was careful with them. Watching her, he was proud and glad and knew that he would stay.

Sam wasn't surprised at either the ridicule or the utter

incredulity of his friends and associates. Now and then, in a white heat of awareness, he was incredulous himself. But he kept on. Only when all the loose ends of business were tied, his finances cleared with the lawyer, his family-assured of their customary indulgences, and he was free, only then did he realize with considerable astonishment that no one had actually tried to dissuade him. Maybe his departure to manage a lady preacher was so far beyond their comprehension that they had no talking point at all. Even Martha could find few words; but she had made him see Jenny in the first place and was therefore in a way responsible.

When he went to see her she put her tatting on top of the pile of linen squares bordered in lavender and yellow.

"The church fair," she said, and delayed further comment until he should explain his coming at this unusual hour. Something must be wrong. Her nose twitched nervously. She replaced a couple of stray hairpins in her bun.

Thinking how like a mouse she was, and how old and grey, Sam told her his plans—twice because she was confused.

She began to rock back and forth. "You mean you want to run off with—with this—this woman?"

"God! No! Martha, it's not like that. Look, this woman is Jenny Angel. Jenny Angel, remember? Don't you understand?"

"Oh!" Tears welled. (Sam hated tears.) She blinked desperately. "You mean you're saved, Sam? You've found Jesus. You want to work in His service. Oh, Sam, Sam! You see I couldn't believe it at first. Oh, Sam, of course." The tears streaked down her cheeks.

Sam wondered how two women could be so different.

"All right," he said. "Call it that. I'm going to manage Jenny Angel's affairs. She needs a business manager. That's all."

"Oh, Sam!" Martha rose and advanced on him. Sam stetled himself to her damp touch and began explaining steadily, specifically about the practical matters, how she would receive her money, what she could do, the lawyer.... Martha knew she had been rebuffed. She dropped her reaching hands and bowed her head. "Of course, Sam. You always know what's best."

Without looking back Sam drove downtown. It was early yet, and there was no need to hurry. He bought a stack of morning papers and read them over a mug of coffee in a café. They had been pretty decent about last night's affair, even about the old man; but they might become too inquisitive. Deciding he ought to be prepared, he phoned the ad man for particulars on the hiring of the old boy.

Davis, answering, was plainly agitated. "Listen, Sam, I didn't do it. I mean I decided to let it ride after all. I figured some damn fool would show up anyhow. I was right. I didn't hire him."

Slowly Sam replaced the receiver. Open to the beating sun the car was broiling when he got in. He crossed his arms on the steering wheel and rested his chin on them as he considered the past few days. Maybe he hadn't known when he was well off. Maybe he was safer, even happier, half dead. Maybe he should have stayed on home ground where at least he understood the language. This Jenny Angel stuff was alien. He'd be a stranger in a strange land all right. God Almighty, maybe he'd lost his mind. Sam straightened up and mopped his face with

an outsized handkerchief. Well, so be it. Here he was.

He started the car and drove aimlessly for a while. Last night's old man whom he hadn't hired haunted him. Jenny would be furious if she found out. She would also be frightened. He had to prevent that. Find the old man, send him away. One newspaper mentioned a possible neighbourhood. Sam drove over and parked against a broken kerb, among a dozen screaming kids and walked, block after block, smothered by the nearness of buildings, bodies, dust bins, cats and fly-bothered markets spread out on the sidewalks. Often he inquired after the old man and was close to quitting when a bunch of excited boys pushed forward one of their number. "That's Tony. He took the old man. He was there."

Tony admitted being there. "He went clean off his nut what with seeing things again, lights and stars and people. He's gone now. Lived over there."

Sam, surrounded by the curious youngsters, called at the rooming house.

The landlady, fat arms akimbo, reported loudly how the old man had come downstairs this morning all packed and said he was going home. He figured everything was squared now that God let him see again. Yes, she had always thought the old fellow was crazy as a bat. Yes, she was glad he was gone. Didn't pay much. No, she didn't know where he had gone. Didn't care either.

Chapter four

SAM gave his bags to the bellboy. He'd be back later for the room. He wanted to see Jenny Angel first. All the way up in the elevator he relived her radiance, her magic. He hadn't fooled himself, had he? He wanted to come. Was that enough?

Mollie, ungainly and incongruous in Jenny's suave setting, opened the door. She let him stand awhile, visibly hiding his disappointment at encountering her. Finally she relented, chuckling to herself. "Well, now, we've sort of been expecting you, me and Jenny Angel. The Lord said you'd come." She offered him her stubby hand and drew him inside companionably.

Sam decided he would have to get used to her, a queer old girl for Jenny to have around but indispensable. He had already sensed that, and aimed to make the best of it. He sank on to a corner of the sofa and made friendly talk while his big hands fretfully pinched at the brim of his hat.

"Here, give me that. You'll ruin it." Deftly Mollie removed the hat. "You've no call to be upset," she commented kindly. "Like I said, it's O.K. with the Lord. We can use you. Jenny Angel's outdoing herself these days." Worship flamed briefly in the humble face.

"Where is she now?"

"Out walking with Jerry."

"Who—who is Jerry?" Jealousy stabbed him.

"Her kid. The little boy, of course."

"Oh, yes. I—I didn't know." So much he didn't know—so much, and already he was caught! "She's married then?"

Mollie studied her square-toed shoes several seconds. "Well, yes, but not so you'd notice it much. Not much at all."

"But the boy's father?"

"The boy's hers. Just hers." Mollie declared fiercely. "And mine maybe. She don't pay him much mind. Like to-day. She takes him for a walk. It's three months since she's done that. And they'll be back soon. He bores her easy." Disapproval thinned her lips. "He's a nice boy."

Sam, recalling the worship, was amazed. So here was another frailty in Jenny, a weak side even Mollie was forced to recognize: Jenny was a poor mother. Sam was almost glad. He wanted her human. How else could he reach her?

Dismayed at her own disloyalty, Mollie hurried on. "Anyhow, she's too busy with the Lord's work. Besides, she don't know how to play. I don't suppose she ever did much—play, I mean. She—she . . . You want some tea, Sam? Tea's a comfort, tea and the Lord Jesus."

She was gone before he could answer.

Over the strong hot drink Sam told about the old man who, it turned out, hadn't been hired.

Mollie was unperturbed. "I kept telling you and her. The Lord's touched her special again, but she won't listen. It's provoking how she won't hear what the Lord's telling her. Like she always knows what the people want,

she ought to know Him too. Instead of asking me all the time. She's Jenny Angel. She's——” Molly stooped to fuss over the tea. “She's coming. I wouldn't tell her about the old man.”

Footsteps in the hall, key in the lock, and a whirlwind of a small boy raced into Mollie's arms, burrowing into her ample lap, sobbing breathlessly. Behind him Jenny entered placidly, her cheeks pinked with the wind, her hair tossed, lovely and childlike.

“Hello—how nice!” Her hand on Sam's was tight and friendly.

He looked from her to the boy.

“That's Jerry, my son. He's mad because I made him come in sooner than he wanted. He's frightfully edgy these days. . . . Jerry, I want you to meet Mr. Wilcox.”

Gently Mollie turned the small boy around. Six or seven, Sam thought, and devastatingly like his mother; tall for his age but slightly built, dark eyes wide and black but with no laughter in them, storm-filled eyes, old and searching.

Sam knelt, “Hello, Jerry.” He didn't know much about children. Usually they belonged in a watertight world of their own. But he wasn't sure about this boy—where he belonged, if anywhere. “We're going to be friends.”

Jerry turned his back.

“That's naughty. We'll have none of that,” Jenny scolded. “Run along now. You cannot stay in company.”

“No.” The small mouth was knife-sharp above a quivering chin. The dark eyes were on her now—hungry, Sam thought, hungry and somehow terribly pathetic. “No, no, no.”

He ran from Mollie and grabbed at his mother's skirt. Her temper burned hot at his defiance. Her strong

hands set him back on his heels. "Behave yourself. . . . Take him, 'Mollie.'" She pulled herself free of his reaching hands and walked away, her back formidable and stiff toward him.

Jerry screamed, "Mama, Mama, Mama!" Mollie began to sniffle.

"Sam," Jenny said, dangerously cool, "I apologize for this ridiculous behaviour. Please take him out, Moll." But Mollie was helpless against the kicking, wriggling boy.

Suddenly, without forethought, Sam picked up the child and held him close. "Show me your room, Jerry."

"It's a rotten old room," Jerry gasped between hiccoughs, "a rotten old hotel room." The crying subsided, and a wet cheek pressed against Sam.

"Show me," Sam directed Mollie. Carrying Jerry, he followed her past Jenny's large, exquisitely furnished bedroom, past the pink-tiled bath, to the small, barren room, unshadowed by a boy's presence.

Jerry clung to Sam's hand when he was set down. "I make Mama awful mad," he confessed. "But she makes me awful mad too. You'll come talk to me, won't you? I need somebody to talk to besides Mollie. Somebody has to talk to me!"

"Sure," Sam muttered. "Sure. Sure." So much he didn't know. So much he hadn't guessed.

Jenny was waiting for him, a pile of papers spread out before her on the mahogany table. "He's an impudent child," she observed, dismissing the incident idly and turning at once to business: her plans for the next months, the places, the publicity, the money. Would he accept a percentage of the take?

"The take?"

"Why, yes, the collections, my share after expenses. It's pretty good lately. We live well."

"So I see," Sam remarked casually. "What do the people think about it?"

"Think? What should they think?"

"They give their money to the service of God, don't they?"

She was unfeignedly astonished. "Of course."

"Do they want you to enjoy it so much?"

"Why ever not? They get their money's worth. They love me."

"I know." Sam smiled. "Of course. Well, let's get down to details."

When they finished in the late afternoon, with the lights turned softly on, the wood sparking cheerfully in the fireplace, and dinner ordered from downstairs, Jenny Angel clasped his big hands in her slim fingers and smiled straight into his eyes. "Sam, I'm glad you've come. It's going to be good." And for one long, warm moment he believed her and was happy.

At odd times in those first weeks, on rattling trains, at service-club luncheons, before church committees, Sam marvelled that this enthusiastic, persuasive, live person could be Sam Wilcox, and that the words "revival," "spiritual renewal," "God," could fall glibly from his lips, mere sounds to him but significant matters to the people he addressed. At first he was asked about the miracles of faith healing—whether this city or that town might be so honoured. He was approached with sincerity by earnest little men in plain ties and silver-rimmed glasses, by middle-aged women, solemn and concerned. He answered discreetly as Jenny taught him. "Only God knows."

When, over the months, nothing extraordinary recurred, even the mention of miracles petered out. But Jenny Angel moved on, and he moved with her.

Except when he had to go ahead to make arrangements, Sam never missed a performance; and he never ceased to wonder at Jenny's personal attraction. When she called, "Come," and they came, he counted the "saved" as seriously as did Mollie. Success tended to be measured in numbers: so many came forward in Toledo, so many in Harrisburg, but what happened in Elizabeth? The crowd was there, but how about the chosen ones? Those were the cream of the crop, but Sam himself was never among them. Regularly Mollie tried to add him to the kneelers; but he resisted. Afterward, when she complained that it was indecent to have a soul without grace working in their midst, Jenny laughed.

"Oh, never mind, Moll, you and I have enough religion for all. Besides"—her smoke-dark eyes glowed—"besides, when he's ready he'll come to me."

Yes, Sam thought, I'll come but not like that, not in a crowd. Meanwhile he could wait. He was happy enough serving her in whatever way he could. And, occasionally, to his dismay, he discovered that service meant taking care of Jerry.

For the boy, Sam's arrival was the only good thing that had ever happened to him. Years of busy women, of trains and taxis and hotels, were all he remembered. Mollie's rough heartiness, Jenny's erratic attentions, some elevator-man's kindness were the sum of his life. No pets, no friends, no teachers. In the sort of existence Jenny Angel shaped there were no provisions for small boys, and Jerry was crushed in the constant excitement and scramble. But he fought back, now sullen, now raging, now ingratiating.

Only rarely did he get his mother. It was never enough. So he nestled into Sam's offhand affection like the starved child he was.

Only if Sam asked it, would the boy submit with any grace to the numerous photographs and public appearances with Jenny. Only if Sam stood by, would he talk pleasantly to the reporters. Yes, he played ball. Alone? Yes, how else? No, he didn't hear his mother often. He was in bed, of course. Alone? Yes, how else? He was seven years old. No, he hadn't been to school. How could he? "Your mother is very beautiful, isn't she?" Sam, watching, saw the black eyes darken in the tense, white face. The ball stopped bouncing. The back straightened. "Very beautiful," Jerry said ringingly. But was it pride or was it resentment? Fortunately the reporter took it as pride; but she couldn't quite erase her pity for the small, lonely boy with the very beautiful mother.

Sam contrived to hide the resultant article from Jenny's sight. She would have been irritated by the pity, for she favoured the family angle. It converted the exotic, magnificent Scarlet Angel into a remarkably respectable human being offstage. The middle class to whom Jenny catered of late liked that. All the hard-working parents, the sentimental spinsters, all the churchgoers and sober citizenry approved her motherhood offstage. Jerry fitted presentably into the background—when Sam made him. Jenny was grateful for that.

At Christmas that year they were all in the East. Light snow tinselled out the city's disfigurements. Shop fronts and store windows full of baubles and frothy angels, featured gifts of all kinds. The times were rich and giddy. Money and laughter flowed as freely as the local bathtub gin. Women sported spit curls and cupid bows, shingled

their hair, smoked cigarettes, wore beaded sacks over their boy-flat bosoms and skimpy skirts to show their rolled silk hose. The men were proud of their "wild women," of their bootlegged liquor, their new cars, and their money. Newspapers wallowed in the immorality. The watch and ward societies rushed about, ferreting out speak-easies and burlesque shows, closing them in one place only to have them mushroom in another twice as brazenly. The times were fast and rickety, but everybody, almost, was happy that holiday.

Nobody wanted to interfere with the celebrations, least of all the police, who patrolled their beats in pairs, ran in an occasional luckless bum for the looks of the thing, and then walked virtuously on while the organized gangs solved the problem by disposing of one another, violently but effectively. Only last week, on Main Street at high noon, somebody had finished off One-Eyed Willie with a shotgun slug. Nobody else got hurt, and so nobody cared much; but it took ten Cadillacs filled with flower pieces and black-hatted mourners to bury him. Christmas, the snow-lovely, pagan-wanton holiday when everybody who was away from home came back and everybody who was at home went away, and when money and spirits oiled the whole fascinating works. A very merry Christmas.

Jenny arrived in the city on the 23rd. Sam, preceding her, had covered the place with posters and had settled all details. Sensibly realizing that it would require a very loud shout to make their city hear any spiritual anthems this year, the sterner souls had pooled their efforts, hired the giant memorial auditorium, rehearsed the choirs, harangued their parishes and people, and done their best generally to Shanghai the city for Jenny Angel. Sam reported it as a good deal, and was rewarded by her delight.

After two days' separation he began to relax now over coffee in Jenny's room. Frankly he let his eyes feast on her, noting for night's remembrance how the lamplight shadowed her finely moulded bones, outlined her throat, her high, full breasts, her long and lovely legs. She wore a straight sheath of silver which seemed to be all light, like herself. Twice Sam's lingering gaze slipped over the length of her, half a room away. The second time she raised one eyebrow and smiled, aware of his desire for her but unperplexed. "You'd better have more coffee, Sam. Your mind is wandering. Now, this hall, are the acoustics good?"

Jenny was indefatigably busy the next days, rehearsing a local drama group in a pageant, checking publicity, trusting no one, not even Sam, to have done every possible thing. He saw little of her save at dinner, and tried to console himself with the boy. He took Jerry to the museum, the movies, the stores, trying vainly to instil Christmas spirit into himself as well as the boy. Jerry was moody and irritable, demanding his mother and not getting her at all; and he was furious in his hunger, striking out at everyone, even Sam, though he was sorry afterward and cried a lot.

Once over a leisurely dessert Sam tried to talk of Jerry to his mother; but she didn't understand. "If he's hungry, feed him, for heaven's sake."

"It's for you, Jenny, for you."

She shook her head impatiently. "Nonsense! He's only a little boy, Sam. Don't go reading adult emotions into his bad temper."

"It's not adult to want——"

She wasn't listening. "Oh, by the way, I want you to be sure and bring him to the service Christmas Eve, I have an idea I can use him."

Sam demurred. "He's not—well—very co-operative these days."

Jenny was exasperated. "Really, Sam. He's only a child. He'll do what he's told."

"He's your child," Sam reminded her. "Will he?"

If she caught the spiked undertone she didn't admit it. "Listen, Sam. I thought Christmas Eve should be a big family time. You know, all ages adoring the holy family together. And I'd like my son out there with me, so they could all see him. Don't you think that would be effective?"

"Effective? The holy family. Very." Then, because he couldn't bear to be cut off by her annoyance, he made himself laugh. "Sure, Jenny, sure. I'll have him there."

The pageant was a ponderous affair, and Jerry managed to be in everybody's way. Dutifully Sam led him out into the crisp cold. Narrow ridges of coal-dusted snow banked the walks, on which there were patches of ice. Under the yellow street lamps clean flakes drifted from cloud-heavy skies. A white Christmas, Sam thought, and some deep-buried childhood habit made him glad. Whistling a carol, he strode briskly twice around the block, darkened now save for the expanse of windows beckoning them back to Jenny Angel.

Jerry ran ahead, leaping and bounding in snow and out with the abandon of a new lamb in pasture. Rescuing him from the last snow heap, Sam brushed him off.

Jerry crowed, "What if I'm all mussed up when I go out there?"

"You'd better not be," Sam advised gloomily.

"Why do I have to go?" The little-boyishness had evaporated, and his mouth pulled down petulant and sullen. "Why?"

"Your mother wants you."

"Why?"

Sam took a firm hold on the boy and headed him back up the steps. God Almighty, he thought grimly, nurse-maiding is not my strong point.

"Why do I have to do what she wants? She never does what I want."

"That's different."

"Why?"

Sam bit his lower lip. "Because she's your mother. Besides, it's Christmas. You know about Christmas?" He was determinedly unbuttoning the boy's jacket with one eye on his watch.

"Sure. It's when Jesus was born. So what?"

So what? At the moment Sam didn't know. He dumped his own coat over a near-by folding chair and examined Jerry. He would have to do. Neat blue suit, white shirt, red rose, the mark of the Scarlet Angel. He didn't need her mark, he was so like her. "Well, anyhow, it's a family day, Christmas. Your mother wants all those people to see her family. You."

"That's silly," Jerry stated flatly. "We're not a family. There's no house, no daddy. Just my mother. That's all."

"She's enough."

The choir caroled lustily. The watch pointed a warning. "Let's go."

"No." Jerry stopped. "No. I won't."

"You must."

"No."

"For God's sake, Jerry." In one quick dip Sam picked him up. "Your mother—"

"No, no." But the boy didn't kick. He allowed himself to be carried, his bone-thin arms clenched desperately

about Sam's neck. With fear? With rage? What? How could Sam read a small boy's heartache? Why, in heaven's name, should he have to?

"Jerry," he said quietly, "you'll be good, won't you?"
"I—I don't know."

Then they caught sight of Jenny in white gown and scarlet cape waiting for them, so lovely, so vibrant, so far beyond their reach.

"You're late," she accused. "Where have you been?"

"In the snow." Jerry released his hold, and Sam put him down.

Jenny took her son's hand. "Do you remember everything?"

"Yes." He seemed small now and caught in something he couldn't comprehend, something he was afraid of.

"Ready then." For a moment she smiled at the boy, but he didn't see. He was staring out at the wide platform banked with green trees and silvered with snow dust.
"Follow me, Jerry. Remember?"

"I remember." Black eyes met black eyes and held.

"Come."

Rudy rose, his trumpet lifted, calling.

To the audience Jerry seemed as angelic as his beautiful mother when the two emerged hand in hand. Jenny began to introduce her son. Christmas was a holy, family time, she said, and she rejoiced that so many of them had brought their children to celebrate Jesus' birthday. So had she, her own lovely little boy, named for one of the great prophets of God, Jeremiah. "Jerry." She turned to draw him forward gracefully.

Jerry didn't move.

"Come here."

Taut, rigid, his eyes smouldering and defiant on his

mother, Jerry stood—hating her, Sam thought in a cold sweat, loving or hating her too much.

"A little child shall lead them," Mollie murmured.

"Not this one," Sam told her bluntly. "He isn't going to do it. My God, he isn't going to!"

Jenny seized both of the boy's hands. "Come." Her voice was sweet and soft for the audience, but her hold brooked no resistance.

Jerry screamed, "No—no—no—no!" Suddenly he kicked her on the shins. Involuntarily she let go. He flung himself on to his back, banging his heels and howling.

The astounded audience watched in horror.

Jenny stood quite still, her back to them, facing the small dark storm that beat itself out at her feet. Humiliation shocked her, then fury that her son could do this to her in public. She shut her eyes.

Mollie cried: "Lord, help her. Dear Father, help her."

Sam said icily: "God help the kid!"

Without a word or a gesture Jenny turned and walked away from the boy, back into her pulpit. She began again to talk reassuringly, almost soothingly. She told the people that they had seen how God's real love for them, His children, was theirs no matter what they did or how they sinned or how they defied and shamed Him. He loved them anyway and would forgive them as she now loved her son and would forgive him. That was the greatest gift of all for Christmas, love like that. Tension snapped. The people nodded to one another. One of her illustrated sermons. They should have guessed, but she did have them really fooled there a spell. The boy was quite the actor. Like his mother, God love him.

Behind her, as she talked, Jerry lay motionless and defeated, one small arm flung across his face. On the far side

of the stage Sam saw Rudy duck behind the organ, and, sheltered by the thick row of balsams, creep up unseen behind Jerry. He reached for the small boy and pulled him back, lifting him out of sight and bringing him to Sam.

"I'll take him home," Sam offered. "You stay here, Mollie—Jenny's going to want you. For God's sake, cool her off."

Mollie nodded. Her broad face was crumpled in misgiving. She clucked her shame at the still sobbing boy, but she kissed him, too, once on the forehead. "I'll stay, but I don't promise she'll cool off. He shouldn't have done that."

Jerry agreed with her. "Mother will whale the daylights out of me," he told Sam as he crawled into bed.

"Maybe she should." Sam didn't know. Loneliness could drive you to desperation, and the line between love and hate could be so fragile as to anguish your heart. Even for a small boy it could be so. Pity filled Sam, but he said, "You were a naughty boy." That sounded stupid. Naughty? Maybe. Heartbroken? Maybe. Who knew? "You made your mother ashamed before all those people."

"I don't care. She paid attention to me, didn't she? You know what, Sam?" He pulled the sheet tight under his chin. He was still shivering, but he wasn't cold. "You know what? My mother doesn't love me. And you know something else, Sam? She doesn't love our Lord Jesus Christ either, I bet. And she doesn't love Mollie. And she doesn't love God. She doesn't love anybody. Not anybody. Not anybody." Near hysteria tumbled his words into a cascade.

Sam reached for the light switch. "Hush now. Good night."

"No. Wait. She does. She loves one person. Sam, One."

"Who?" Sam's hand stayed an instant. Now he would know. The boy's father? Who was the man? "Who?" The word whipped out of him as the room fell into darkness.

A slit of street light spilled from the window across the tufted counterpane and picked out the small heap of boy. Jerry rolled over, nose buried in his pillow emitting a muffled chant. "Herself. Just Jenny Angel. Jenny Angel loves only Jenny Angel. That's what. Just——"

Sam tiptoed out, closing the door.

For a while he sat in the living-room with the lights turned off and listened to the subdued sounds of the hotel night: elevators wheezing, footsteps passing, water gurgling. Jerry's chant pricked at him: "Jenny Angel loves only Jenny Angel. Herself." That wasn't quite true. She loved her public, her people, gave unstintingly of herself to them, devoted every waking hour to them, the thousands, the nameless, the adoring, upturned masses of faces. She loved her public but no one else, maybe, not even her son. Well, other women lacked maternal instinct. Besides, time was so short and demands so great that something had to be lost to the common good. Maybe Jerry was the eternal sacrificial lamb, the one who gets hurt because of the many. It was too bad. A small boy crying could make you maudlin with unnecessary sentiment. After all he was only a kid, and he had acted like a little devil to-night. A kid gets over things quickly, and this one was a brat. Never mind why.

Oh, Jenny, Jenny Angel! Sam closed his eyes tightly. His body was clumsy in the oversoft chair, his muscles ached. He longed for a cigar, for a drink, for a woman. Any woman? No doubt he could be accommodated through one of the bellhops in the lobby, but "any woman" was no good any more. To-night as on other

nights he yearned passionately and painfully over the impossible, the unattainable. Behind his smarting lids he saw Jenny then as he had imagined her a dozen times lately, lying naked on his bed, a breeze stirring her hair, arms lifted to him, full breasts straining for his touch. Then he saw himself going to her—Sam, the chosen one to bring her vibrantly, gloriously alive as a thousand eyes in far-off faces could never do. His sweat-soaked shirt stuck to his shoulder blades. He ran his hands across his burning face. “My God, I’m too old for this!” He rose and shuffled out to the tiny kitchen to wash his face in cold water and make a pot of coffee. He kept telling himself, a little desperately. “I’m a fool, a poor benighted damn fool.”

A flash of dread as Jenny entered the apartment yielded to the affectionate tone of her greeting. “Hi, Sam. Why all the dark? Where are you? Hi, Sam?”

“Here,” he answered, and he was no longer a fool because she was there, warm, gay, close. Jenny Angel.

“Hello, Sam. Coffee! How nice! Listen, that steeple clock is striking—ten, eleven, twelve. Midnight.” She locked her arm through his. “Merry Christmas, Sam.”

She was glowing with the triumph of having so cleverly, so convincingly transformed humiliation into victory. She wasn’t even angry at the boy any more. She forgave him, remember? But she had decided it was time for boarding school. He needed the education, and it would be easier for all of them.

“Coffee, Moll?” She turned quickly toward the stocky figure lumbering in behind her.

“No, Jen, tea. Hot water and a tea ball.” Mollie was beaming with relief and satisfaction that the Lord had given Jenny the wit to save a bad situation. “Then I’m going to bed. I’m going to praise the Lord and go to bed.”

Sam glanced from one radiant face to the other. So, he thought, the collections provide boarding school for one small boy. Praise the Lord indeed. And we're all happy aren't we, Jenny?

He poured the coffee. "Let's go back to the living-room. Oh, yes, Merry Christmas, Mollie, Jenny Angel. Merry Christmas."

"It was lovely," she told him breathlessly when they sat together on the couch. "All the people, Sam. Really lovely." She tilted her head to meet his intense gaze. And he was lost in her then, in her shining beauty, in her radiance. She was a woman, whatever else she was. She was that, and God knew he was a man and had come for this. After all, he had come for Jenny Angel. He put out his hand to her.

She grew quiet then, seeing the desire and the desperation in his eyes and the intention in his lifted arm. She did not move away. It was long since any man had been this close, daring enough to think of her as a woman. She liked it. She wanted it. She pressed her hand against his knee. Sam was kind. Sam was good. If he loved her, who would guess? He worked with her. If there was more, who would know? Sam! Strange she had not thought of this before. Sam was strong. Sam was kind. He loved her. And she was young and ripe and unfulfilled. In that instant he could have had her. Maybe it was too easy. Sam didn't move. He stared deeply into her eyes and read in their blackness a mockery as well as an invitation. Maybe he was wrong but, God Almighty, he thought, she knew what she could do to a man, and she gloried in it. And afterwards? Jenny Angel loves Jenny Angel. Only Jenny Angel. What of the part of her that was aloof, impregnable, unapproachable? She wouldn't offer that. And when she was through?

To Jenny he looked at the moment like a callow youth begging for sweet gifts, yet refusing them, afraid—like a kid, at his age! And Jenny laughed quietly and without spite.

Sam, his cheeks cruelly crimson, his big hands fumbling, stood up and said "Goodbye" with unexpected formality.

"Sam, wait, I didn't mean——"

But he left her, and she stood alone in the middle of the room and began to cry.

Wakeful in bed, she listened to the night noises outside her half-opened window: truck horns and taxi brakes, raucous yells of a party breaking up, and the hourly striking of the steeple clock in the square. Two. Three. Jenny lay on her back and fought off the old loneliness that had flooded when Sam walked away. For years now no man had touched her. There had been leers and wolf whistles, which she accepted casually as a low tribute to her physical beauty, but the only loving she was allowed was disguised as religion. And now Sam had awakened forgotten longings.

At three o'clock she pulled on her gold-threaded quilted robe, stuck her feet into matching mules, and got up. She shut the window to the north wind and knelt there, arms on the sill. A sickly moon accented the church tower. Rows of street lamps laced the dark streets together in a jewelled design. An alley cat skittered across the sidewalk and disappeared leaving the streets devoid of all life. Only cement and shadows and silence remained.

To such loneliness as hers what would she, the Scarlet Angel, daughter of the Lord God himself, what would she preach? Hymns answered her: "What a friend we have in Jesus"; "Let me to thy bosom fly"; "Safe in the arms of Jesus." Her teeth chattered. It was queer to sing those

thoughts. Jesus was an image only, in the mind, maybe in the heart, but not real in the flesh. No answer at all for this loneliness. Perhaps those poor, starved women who heard and believed her, perhaps their emaciated bodies could find satisfaction in an image. Her own body was not emaciated: it was vital and healthy, and Jesus was no answer. Neither was Sam. Trembling, she let herself think on Sam awhile. Good. Kind. Big. Wise. But he was not the answer. She tried consciously to picture herself in Sam's arms, his mouth on her lips, her throat, but it didn't work. So, it would be no good. Some day there would have to be an answer; but not now, not Sam. Somewhere, maybe there was love for Jenny Angel.

She crept back into bed and let the hot tears trickle under her lids. So many years since she had wept—too many, perhaps. A woman ought to weep sometimes. She forced herself to think about the pageant. True, Jerry had acted a little monster; but she had used even that to good advantage. The people had never been more with her, more reverently responsive to her call. Her son had failed her, but her people had not. She was getting warmer now. Tears faltered, and her knees bent comfortably. Four o'clock. The night was tranquil as if all living things had vanished, and the buildings were mere shells mounted on the larger empty shell of the earth. Old. Empty. Dark. But tranquil.

"God," she said aloud. "God. God. God." There was no answer. She was not surprised.

The silence deepened around her. She began to cry again, softly and painlessly, her hands folded tight and lonely against her breasts.

Chapter five

BY the end of January, Jerry was safely established at a fashionable boarding school in Connecticut. His departure had been bitter. Stubbornly he resisted his rejection, refusing to say goodbye, refusing to board the train. Finally, Sam carried him in and sat with him a while talking earnestly of reading and writing and future friends until Jenny appeared. Clad in smartest blue, a fox fur across her slim shoulders, one scarlet rose at her throat, she walked down the aisle with every female eye tagging after her enviously.

"Is he being difficult?"

"No," Sam said. "Just lonely."

"Poor lamb!" Sitting down, Jenny slipped an arm about the boy. His face kindled instantly with surprise and gratitude, and he nestled against her shoulder. Up and down the car women's heads bobbed in approval. Sam withdrew unobtrusively.

When Jenny returned she reported that the school was fine, a little rigid probably but quite top-class. Jerry would get a good education. Besides, he would be happier than with them, obviously much happier. Mollie and Sam held

fit to colour Rudy black, that was the Lord's affair, not hers or theirs.

They overlooked that. The people, they pointed out, simply would not stand for a Negro in their service. All the rest of the afternoon the argument continued. Sam, arms folded, back against the door, was a nonparticipating witness, at first amused, and then alarmed as the anger rose. At last the delegation departed with stern warnings, leaving Jenny tired but not cowed.

Sam remarked cautiously: "When in Rome better do as the Romans do, Jen. Send Rudy away. I guess he'd be happier too."

"No. I will not be browbeaten. Besides, I love the trumpet." She was silent a long moment, her black brows merging in a frown, the fingers of one hand impatiently tapping her smooth wrist. "It's the colour they don't like," she said, "but colour's an outside thing. Sometimes it can be changed. They don't know Rudy. They just don't like him black. They love me. If I——" She paused, rubbing her fine white skin with suddenly purposeful fingers.

Sam shifted uneasily. "If you what?"

When she looked up she was half smiling. "You'll see, Sam. Send me Mollie now, will you?"

"Be careful, Jen."

She was standing up now, her sleeves pushed back, her arms bare and lovely and white in the dim and sticky room, and she was laughing softly. "Please, Sam, do get Mollie. I haven't much time."

"What about Rudy?" he insisted.

"Colour's an outside thing," she said again. "We'll keep him."

That night when the lights went down in the big tent,

and the quartet had retired, Rudy was waiting, grey under his chocolate skin, lips dry on the trumpet's mouth-piece, fingers uncertain.

The tent bulged. People sat on folding chairs, movable benches, pillows; and, with the tent's canvas sides rolled up, they spread over the grass beyond. In Sunday best from silks to calicoes, they waited the long-promised revelation, the beautiful lady of God. They whispered and murmured excitedly, swished their fans, shushed the infants, and waited. Then rumour in ugly spurts passed among them. A black boy? She couldn't. A black boy here? She wouldn't. But they said the deacons said . . .

When they heard the trumpet they knew, and they groaned. Then they gasped. Jenny Angel in her white and scarlet strolled calmly out before them and began to preach. Her voice was pleasantly familiar; her movements were proverbial. It was the Angel. But her face and her arms were exquisitely, exotically stained a deep, golden brown. For some minutes they sat in stunned silence.

"You see," Jenny said, "I'm still your Scarlet Angel. Colour means nothing. God doesn't notice a man's skin if his heart is gold and his soul is white." With her brown arms outstretched to them, she smiled. She had no doubts, so sure was she of their love and admiration.

"Traitor." "Liar." "Nigger lover." They ranted. They whistled. They hissed. They beat their feet on the sawdust floor raising a yellow fog. They struck their fists on the chairs and roared. They threw things: eggs and tomatoes from their lunches, torn papers, stinging spitballs and small stones.

Tomato juice streaked Jenny's brown cheek. Sawdust dirtied her gown. Behind her Rudy disappeared. In the aisles the ushers attempted half-heartedly to quell the

crowd. But the same unpredictable emotions that had brought them to their knees in worship for her now brought them to their feet in hatred. Twice she tried to speak. They drowned her with catcalls and rebel yells. She invoked God's protection, and they hooted.

Sam got her out. He strode on stage and literally pried her away from them, hauled her outside, and shoved her into the back seat of a car he had hired that afternoon. Mollie, clutching a suitcase, was already there. He drove furiously over the rugged roads, not knowing where he went save that it was north.

"That was the craziest, damn-fool trick," he shouted above the motor.

"Shut up, Sam," Mollie ordered bluntly.

"We'll never get South again."

"Just shut up."

"They won't forget it." He simmered down, listening to Jenny's sobbing and Mollie's clucking behind him.

Half an hour later Jenny remarked clearly: "You're right, Sam. I was a damn fool."

They couldn't console her. She was unbelievably hurt, her body aching with the sickness of her soul. Her people had not loved her, after all. Now she could never be sure of them again. And yet, she knew it was her own fault. She who prided herself on reading the public's wants should have behaved more sensibly. Even Rudy had known better. But it had been hot; the delegation had been patronizing and difficult; and, besides, Rudy was her friend. If the Lord had made him black, what of that? It had seemed so simple at the time. But she had been counting on love, of course. She couldn't count on love, she knew that. She was a damn fool.

"Sam, stop here."

He pulled off the road beside a clump of scrub pine which hovered over a running brook.

"I'll wash this stuff off," Jenny said, climbing out, "and change this robe. Then we're going back."

Sam started to protest but thought better of it. Mollie opened the suitcase, took out a couple of towels, and knelt beside her to help rub away the brown.

After a bit Sam followed them. They made weird shadows in the brilliant moonlight. Like voodoo priests, he thought, crouching over a precious pool. Beyond the brush hill a fox barked, and a dog howled. Nearer, living things whisked through the underbrush.

He urged uneasily: "Hurry up. We ought to be getting somewhere to-night."

"We're going back, Sam. You know that. We've a lot of things to settle up. I've got to make peace if I can. I wonder where Rudy is."

"On a train for Boston. He kept the ticket in his pocket."

Jenny looked up. Her face was half white, half brown. Sam laughed down at her. "You made a handsome brown girl, Jen. Too bad they didn't appreciate you."

"It was crazy, but it seemed like a good idea at the time." Paint and tears washed away, she settled back on her heels a moment, one hand on Mollie's. Some love you counted on. But you had to be careful, always watchful. Good Mollie. Good Sam. But my people. Her throat hurt again.

"It nearly got us killed," Sam said.

She stood up quickly. "No. Not that. But it was bad. And we're going back now."

Mollie heaved herself up. "That's all right," she agreed reluctantly. "But thank God we go North to-morrow. Fact is, I don't much like being scared."

The next day the northern newspapers heard the tale and hailed it happily. Even the liberals, who had often scorned her, recorded her dramatic loyalty to a Negro friend with due appreciation. Churches, political groups, interracial clubs applauded. Jenny, shaking the dust of Georgia from her, sailed back into the northern cities on an unexpected cloud of glory. Only Sam was surprised.

"The Lord's way is mysterious sometimes," Mollie admitted, "but Jenny's got it. Always lands right side up, Sam."

Like a kitten, Sam thought fondly, right side up and purring. Like a doggoned cat.

In October, Sam hired office space on State Street in Chicago, with a minimum of furniture. He even stayed put long enough to install an experienced secretary and an owl-eyed young file clerk who stopped each morning before Jenny's coloured portrait with the undeniable reverence of a nun at prayer. They all worked hard. By telephone, by mail, in person the requests for Jenny Angel's presence rolled in. Sam tried to persuade her to take a vacation. She couldn't afford to listen. Her life-blood was in her speaking, moving on, preaching again. She couldn't stop anywhere, any time. Gamely Sam gave up his dreams of quiet hours with her and worked on her programme. By November he had a satisfactory tour lined up. The days ticked off with pleasant regularity. All was well.

At Thanksgiving, Sam went home. Martha had written timidly that their daughter, Carol, was to be married and it seemed proper—that is, they would appreciate it, providing it didn't interfere with his work, if he would take

part in the ceremony. They planned a fashionable wedding since Carol was marrying the wealthy socialite, Frank Harvey, Jr., a lanky freckled youth Sam would remember as having been in and out of the house since infancy. Sam didn't remember. All the kids were as alike as marbles to him, especially the boys with their knickers and cowlicks. But he did remember Frank Harvey, Sr., a beak-nosed, sharp-witted corporation lawyer. A good match, financially speaking. Sam was relieved about that.

He went by rail and was sick all the way. He resorted to Wilcox Headache Tablets, but they didn't help much. He couldn't admit, even to himself, that he might be taking the wrong remedy. Wilcox No-Nerve pills might have been more to the point, because he was scared. He tried to prepare himself for the full-dress affair of old friends and business associates. In advance he accepted their curiosity and their mocking cynicism. He didn't hate them. He didn't even blame them, but he didn't know how to answer them, either. "How's life with the gorgeous angel huh?" "And how's business, Sam? In the chips? You've got quite a product there." Yes, Sam thought, a product without peers, a business to be proud of—but he couldn't devise exactly the right answer. He postponed the last lap home as long as he could, sitting an hour over the station's lunch counter writing lonesome postcards to Jenny at her next stop, to Jerry at school, even to Mollie. Then he tramped disconsolately out and took a taxi.

Nothing had altered. Behind the spiked iron fences the stone house, square with fat yellow chimneys at each corner squatted under the overpowering trees. He had always intended to have the trees trimmed, but Martha liked the eternal shadows; they protected her, she explained meekly. Well, maybe she had need of protection.

Poor Martha. Probably a lot of persons were saying that now. What do you mean, poor Martha? Why, she could buy and sell half the gold coast on her husband's investments! Yes, but look at her, poor thing! Poor Martha.

Sam rang. Inside, too, the house was unchanged: white hall gleaming with gold-rimmed mirrors and a sweep of feathery ferns; long living-room in palest blue weighted with huge, shapeless mahogany pieces but lightened with bits of pink, a lamp shade, a vase of tea roses. Then Martha emerged from behind the grand piano, a pot of purple African violets delicate in her hands.

Seeing him, her faded blue eyes dilated; her throat muscles knotted. "Sam!" A moment later she said, quite unruffled: "I'm glad you came. The children will be in presently." She set the violets down and gave him her hand, plump and soft. "Sit down, Sam."

He chose a tall, winged chair with its back to the windows, from which he looked at Martha serene in her own surroundings and heard the quietness and felt the peace folding around him.

"It's quiet here." She tinkled a tiny bell for tea.

"Yes, restful." It was never restful where Jenny was, nor quiet, nor serene.

Sam accepted his tea and tried not to know that right now Jenny Angel would be having supper in her hotel room, her eyes would be bright with anticipation and her mouth scarlet and sweet. He reached for another sugar lump and awkwardly knocked his cup against the saucer. The crack resounded like a shot. "I'm sorry."

Martha was asking in her gentle monotone, "Are you contented, Sam?"

Contented, my God! He'd never asked to be contented; but he was alive, acutely, blessedly alive.

He temporized. "I like my work. It's interesting."

"And dedicated," she added. "God's work. That's good."

He wet his lips with the tip of his tongue. "Dedicated, yes."

"Yet we could never quite get accustomed to it. Your going was sudden, you know. People are still—well, curious."

"And you, Martha—what do you think?"

Her blue eyes regarded him steadily. "After all, Sam, I took you to her."

"I know."

The quietness thickened about him again. A small breeze escaped the heavy draperies and bore in the voices of young people from the lawn. He would have to face them soon now.

As he asked hurriedly: "How's Carol?" his daughter entered—a large, placid girl, a stranger to him. Strangers were easier to meet than old friends.

At day's end Sam credited himself with passable behaviour. He had managed to slip back into the groove of talk about people whose names he determinedly recalled, about business deals whose details were of his own making. It was all very polite, very friendly. No one mentioned Jenny Angel. Once Sam thought hazily: It's almost as though I were on parole from prison, the disgraced being given a gentleman's second chance. I wonder what they think I did. Laughing to himself, he never mentioned Jenny Angel either.

At bedtime he discovered he was to share Martha's room, their old room. "We're so crowded," she explained unnecessarily, "so many for the wedding." Sam didn't reply. Only gradually did he realize that she was expecting

him to act the husband to-night. After all this time, after all the separation she still wanted him. Sam was shocked, reading the naked hope in her pale eyes.

Seated at her dressing-table, Martha unpinned her hair, creamed her skin, and watched him. My husband, Sam, my husband by law, by years, by offspring. My husband, Sam.

The enormous double bed with its carved flowers and cavernous depths dominated the room. Helpless, Sam stood in his flannel robe and stared at it and longed for his narrow hotel bed, the chaste, undemanding bed.

Martha called to him. "Help me with this clasp, will you? The beads are stuck."

Because he shrank from hurting her whom he regularly hurt so much, Sam went to her.

Her white shoulders were bare, her fleshy breasts bulged over the lace-topped slip and corset. Sam thought of Jenny and couldn't touch her.

"Please."

He fumbled at the clasp.

She studied him minutely. "You know, Sam, I am relieved. You look as old as I do."

Tiredness dulled him. He recognized the truth of middle age to-night. "We are the same age. Forty-five, I believe. What did you expect?"

"I don't know. That woman is supposed to work miracles. I thought maybe she had given you youth or love or beauty. That's what you wanted, Sam, really, wasn't it? Not God. But you're not young. That's a comfortable thought for me."

"You can't stop the years." The clasp broke, and the pearls slithered down into her ample lap. She caught them skilfully between her knees.

"I think I'll go downstairs and read awhile." Sam tried to save himself.

"No. It's been a long time, and I am your wife. Jenny Angel has nothing to do with you to-night, has she, Sam?"

Sam knew that to deny Martha now would be to confess his love for Jenny. And he was not prepared to admit he was a damn fool, not to Martha, not yet. He moved slowly toward the bed. "I'm very tired," he said, and lay down and waited while she undressed. If he closed his eyes, he thought, and kept them closed, and filled his mind with a beautiful vision, if he remembered only Jenny Angel, maybe . . . He heard Martha snap out the lights and come padding toward him on quiet feet.

Through a maze of wedding festivities and family parties Sam plodded nobly the next days and arrived at last somehow at the affair itself, in a beflowered, be-peopled Gothic church at high noon. In formal attire and emotionless mien Sam endured it all. But at the country-club reception he began to count the hours until he could decently depart. Jenny would be in Indiana to-night. If he caught the early train he would be there before she finished.

"Hi, Sammy." Frank Harvey, Sr., father of the groom, peered at him over a bowl of white gladioli. "Heaven's sake, Sammy, let's go out to my car and have a drink. Special Scotch hiding there for the occasion." He strong-armed Sam down the hall, out to the parking lot. Docilely Sam settled into the rear seat of the Buick sedan. Suddenly he was exhausted and almost grateful to his daughter-in-law for proffered aid.

Harvey poked furtively under the seat cushion and extracted a silver flask. He unscrewed the cap, sucked

greedily. "Good stuff. Hard to get. I'll give you the name of my smuggler. Top man. Rocky Patina." His smile froze. "For God's sake, Sammy, you got religion. Maybe you don't—"

Sam seized the flask and took a long, warm gulp. Then he slouched down comfortably. The fresh, sombre November air drifted over him, cleaning his skin. The warmth inside him spread. He felt better.

Frank Harvey was eyeing him curiously. "Now that we're in the same family, Sam, I'd like to ask, Why did you do it? You could have had anything you wanted in the business world. Some say it's the woman. I saw her once. Wow!" Middle-aged hands gestured significantly, but Sam didn't see. He had shut his eyes, remembering Jenny.

"Why did you leave, Sam?" Intimate, persistent. "Sure, she's making a pile of money; but you didn't need money. What did you need? A woman? A real, live woman, not like Martha? What's she like, Sammy, eh? What's she really like, offstage? In bed, maybe?"

Sam wasn't mad: Frank was feeling fine, and just wanted his little joke. "No, it wasn't like that," he answered confidentially. "I got religion, didn't you know? I'm saved, Frankie, saved." He was dangerously close to giggling.

Frank Harvey sat up primly. "Yeah." He climbed out of the car. "Well, what's she like?"

No answer.

"If you want that fellow's name, Sam, the one with the good Scotch, it's Rocky Patina. Good Joe in his way." He half turned, his fingers still on the door latch. "If it had been the woman, I'd have understood."

Sam grinned at him.

"Well, goodbye, Sam. Glad the kids are happy. No hard feelings. All in the family."

Sam tipped the doorman to summon a taxi and told the driver to wait in front of the house while he changed his clothes. He phoned Martha. She seemed to be distracted but not seriously upset by his abrupt farewell.

"Come again, Sam. Please come when you can."

"Sure. Of course. Take care."

He boarded the early train, and he made the Scarlet Angel's evening performance before the closing trumpet note.

As usual Mollie was in the wings, absorbed in Jenny. He tapped her arm, and she beamed: "Glad you're back, Sam. We missed you."

"Did—did she miss me?"

Mollie drew her eyes off Jenny to scrutinize him. She shook her head. "Yes, Sam, but not like that, not like you want."

No, of course not! He knew that. He took off his hat and placed it atop his coat on a pile of boards. After so many days he thought he could not endure another five minutes without Jenny. Hurry, Jen, please hurry.

As if in answer the organ thundered into its postlude, pushing out the crowd. Now she would come. Now.

"Sam!"

He turned.

She was running to him hands outflung, face alight in welcome. For an instant that was enough for him.

Book three

Chapter one

THE wheels, Sam thought, the night music, thundering, rattling, steel striking steel; the wheels and, underncath, the generous plains, the rock mountains, the tall and trembling trestles, the cities' roadbeds; then, train calling train, lonesome in passing. He smiled. The wheels and the whistle had been his lullaby for five years now, and he would sleep to them again to-night, knowing he moved with Jenny. He shifted his knees to balance the brief case that served both as desk and as file cabinet. Carefully he detailed the next day's schedule. Again Chicago, kind, loud Chicago, which had been his beginning but, please God, would not be his end. It was late, but he was used to working late. How many hundreds of nights had he worked like this? For Jenny Angel, he was never tired; he had deliberately tried to make himself indispensable to her. Her growing dependence on him was his lifeblood, but he did not fool himself. Not quite. Without him she would continue to thrive. Without her . . .

Sam sighed and put his work away. Without her, he was nothing. He closed his eyes and listened to the rumbling wheels. Chicago, here we come. Five years. Ten years. Tomorrow is for celebration. Ten years since the Scarlet

Angel began to speak to her people. Five years since Sam joined her. O morning stars, sing together! Sun and moon, praise her! She was a comet among them, Sam thought, beautiful, fiery, fast, yet travelling in a predictable orbit. In the tailwash you were burned, you were beaten, you were breathless but, by God, you were glad, you hung on! Hell or high water, warm earth or freezing outer space, you hung on. Anyhow, Sam did. And others, millions of others.

When the world economy had shattered like a broken toy, and men were hungry in the streets, and children cold and women afraid, Jenny swept on and on. The collections ran more to dimes than to dollars; but prices sank too, and the people multiplied. Millions frantically pursuing something they could believe and enjoy and also afford found Jenny, her magnificent showmanship, her diversion for a dime, her spellbinding self. . . . That was the highbrow explanation of her triumph in hard times; but the people knew better. They discovered diversion, yes, and the glorious Angel herself, but more too. The highbrows might scoff, but the common people knew. When you had decided that you, the entire United States, and maybe the whole world were dismal failures, you weren't above digging out frail hope in whatever dump or dogma might hide it. Here was the Scarlet Angel calling, "Come." For a little while, a couple of hours even, you had hope and felt loved. That was worth the dime even if you skipped supper. Compassion walked with Jenny across the stage. Love cast out fear. Faith flickered in the answering breast. Sure, there would be pie in the sky by and by; but in Jenny's sky it would be served with ice cream and coffee. Who would be fool enough to refuse to be scorched at the Angel's fire, who would not listen for a night? So Sam

had gone on counting collections and managing finances while his one-time business associates leaped out of skyscrapers or pawned their last golf clubs.

Remembering 1929 now, Sam experienced the familiar shock, half amazement, half relief. A March Sunday, he recalled.

Bleak fields under ballooning wind clouds had whisked by the dining-car windows. Across from him Mollie was scowling over her teacup at the newspaper. "It ain't natural," she had announced. "It just ain't natural: people making money so easy. You put up two dollars, you come out with two thousand. It's not likely the Lord will put up with that much longer." And she banged her spoon against her saucer for emphasis. Beside her, Jenny chuckled. "Don't you think the Lord wants people to have money?" "Not like that, Jen. Not too easy. Mark my words"—with an ominous pause. "It just ain't natural. He won't like it."

Sam had been watching Jenny as Mollie made her point. In her pale green wool with the scarlet rose pinned to her collar she was spring itself, long awaited and lovelier than anticipated. Her eyes shone like those of a child setting out on a picnic, for, at the request of a group of British churches, they were going abroad in June, and nothing could mark her anticipation. Therefore it was odd that Mollie's words—"It ain't natural"—should have remained with him so. By the end of April they had influenced him to turn conservative, sell all their holdings, even in the Wilcox Drug Company, buy a few gilt-edged government bonds, and redistribute the rest of their funds in the most secure banks he knew across the entire country. When by fall he realized his luck and his sense, he was proud of himself. But Jenny took it for granted that he

would protect them, and Mollie, triumphant, applauded the Lord's wisdom in preserving His own. Sam had laughed to himself then, because he hadn't needed their praise for this miracle of money saved. He was still basking in the happiest time of his life.

In Europe, Sam had made his first promenade into Eden. Pleased by her reception in England, flattered as an international figure, Jenny was riding high. When she agreed to a holiday in France she threw herself zestfully into the adventure. He was Jenny's constant companion, occasionally with Mollie in tow; but more often she was left behind at a café table or in a hotel lobby, contented to stare at France and marvel that she was there at all. Sam fell in love with the country from village to barnyard, from city to sailboat. Or maybe it was only his love for Jenny shedding itself on everything he saw or touched, transforming his world and himself. They visited cathedrals and night clubs, rode in the Bois, sipped wine in candlelight, bought luxuries in Paris shops and books in open stalls. Everywhere Jenny sparkled; the French admired her, and Sam was proud. For this little while she was uniquely his, not physically—he didn't even ask for that—but in attention, looking for him in a crowd, holding out her hand to him, sharing herself with him, smiling. Sam was in paradise. Tirelessly he danced, walked, climbed. Youth flowed in him that September for the last time.

Now on the Chicago-bound train Sam touched his grey hair and rubbed his bony chin. Love had possessed him then and never loosed him since. Outside, the plains spread wide and dark with night. The train shrilled at a crossing and hurtled on, leaving a swath of lonesomeness. Love never let you go. He remembered the boat trip home

and the one bad night in the pink-cotton candy of his joy:

In the main salon the band had whipped and whirled the dancers like a wanton breeze swirling petals through blue space. The side lights were low, but overhead a spot sprinkled rainbows on the floor. He had come in a bit late. Jenny was already surrounded by men eager for the black sweep of her lashes, the scarlet curve of her mouth, the swing of her white shoulders above the scarlet gown, breast-tight, hip-hugging, erasing the Angel in her, leaving her all woman. And he thought: My God, is Satan a woman? And Jenny? He froze against the wall while the young men, the bronzed, strong young men, claimed her. Jenny Angel was no longer his. Venus in red, exulting in the adoration of her slaves, Jenny danced and laughed.

Suddenly Sam had turned green-sick with jealousy. He fled the plush hall, stumbled on to the deck, leaned heavily on the rail, peering down and down into the black sea. Jealousy was a stabbing in his head, a nausea in his stomach. He hated himself for the pettiness of it. After all, he had known he couldn't have her. Many things he could be to her, but not her lover; and he had made the best of it, licking his wounds, snatching at crumbs, even being happy. How long? Just so long as no other man had her. Precisely. There must be no other man. Hot and shaken. Sam bent above the black sea. But all he thought was, "Jenny." Everything in him that was not in pain was tired beyond believing. Oh, Lord Almighty, Jenny! She was young and desirable. Many men would want her as he wanted her, tearing their hearts out, poor fools. And if she went to one? That could be death for Sam, because he couldn't endure this green-sick jealousy for all time. He wanted to cry, but he had no tears. His knuckles were bone-white on the rail.

"Sam, are you ill?" Her slim fingers were lightly stroking the back of his neck. "Are you all right?"

He forced himself to face her. She was alone. So she had left all the young men and come to seek him. He spoke slowly, trying to let the nightmare and the sickness go. "Yes, I'm all right."

"I wanted you to rescue me from all those crazy kids, but you didn't come."

"No. I saw you dancing. You looked—happy."

Her black eyes surveying his ravaged face were soft with quick understanding. "Let's walk the deck, Sam. I'm not equal to their dancing. Come on."

Her arm was firm and round pressing against him. Her fingers laced through his. Sam was dizzy with relief.

"How huge the stars are!" she remarked quietly.

"Yes." Funny, he hadn't noticed any stars before. "Jenny," he whispered, "Jenny Angel."

"M-m-m. You know, Sam, it will be good to get back and be Jenny Angel again."

Now above their railroad train the sky had clouded over. Rain spattered against the pane obscuring a cluster of lights that marked some hamlet. Sam shivered, put away his papers, and rang for the porter to make up his berth. Chicago. Coming, Chicago!

He would be fifty this week, he thought, studying the mirror speculatively. Jenny didn't know that. True, his hair was grey, but it was thick; he had a fine complexion; he walked erect. He had dropped some forty pounds along the years, so that he was a bit thin for his big frame; but Jenny thought he was "distinguished-looking." He liked her description and habitually omitted desserts to stay that way.

Only Martha had objected: "Sam, you're getting

downright skinny. I wish you'd let me fatten you up." She could too. She had got to be quite a cook since taking that little apartment. Martha would remember his fiftieth birthday with a golden cake swathed in orange icing. He would eat it at Martha's: he didn't have to be distinguished there. Funny about Martha's sort of back-door return to his life and his change in attitude toward her. He himself was different when he was with her. He would walk from the station north of Chicago past rows of brick or stucco houses set in identical lawns. Finally he would arrive at the town's shopping centre, a block-square affair of two-story brick on three sides of a tiny green. Drugstore. Hardware. Grocery. Notions. And, upstairs, two- and four-room apartments. Above one push button the card read: "Martha Wilcox."

Sam's first, rather uneasy visit to Martha's apartment had been just after his return from Europe, when America was having its financial collapse. From his lawyer he had discovered that, although the Wilcox estate had lost a good deal, the Wilcox Drug Company itself survived. Therefore Martha had acted needlessly in her hasty disposal of the house and other possessions. Vexed, he had set out to tell her so and to resettle all matters, because he had no intention of being plagued with family problems: Jenny left no room for them.

Martha had met him temperately at the door; but no sooner was he seated than she told him bluntly: "Look, Sam, I'm glad I sold the place. Carol's having a baby soon. Her in-laws, the Fred Harveys, lost everything. They needed help. I sold that ridiculous house for a fair price. I found this apartment and moved in. That's all, except that I like it. Do you know why? My neighbours

don't know who you are. I am myself. I don't have to be Sam Wilcox's wife or make pretences or anything. I'm near Carol, and she'll be needing me when your grandchild arrives—— Does that startle you, Sam? You winced. Your grandchild. Well, there's a nice couple next door who run the drugstore downstairs and let me help out sometimes." Martha's tongue sprinted on. Sam gaped at more words than he remembered in their whole last year together. "There's some other lone women near-by. We play cards once a week. I teach in the church school. Oh, Sam, people really want me again. A lone woman can be useful if—a lone woman . . ." Breath and defiance expired together. Martha flushed. "Well, Sam, after all——"

"Sure, I know." He leaned back comfortably in the big chair and studied her. She had changed: she was not so dumpy, not so mousy, more—alive. Evidently she fared better without him. Well, that was balm to whatever conscience might nettle him. He was honestly glad for both their sakes. "All right, Martha, ease down," he said amiably. "It's O.K. It was your house. If you're happy, O.K."

"I am, Sam. I really am."

"Good." He glanced round recognizing an occasional dark piece of furniture, the African violets, the pale blues, but surprised by the daffodil draperies and the whole golden wall radiating like light splintering fog.

Martha brought him warm apple pie on a yellow pottery plate and hot coffee in a copper pot. "I made the pie myself," she declared. "I'm really getting good again."

It was good, the pie, the coffee, the whole visit—good and cosy and unperturbed. Sam found the chair substantial enough for his big frame, the coffee strong enough for his liking. And when Martha asked him he regaled her

with anecdotes of his summer trip and was intoxicated by her rapt attention. He stayed much longer than he had intended. Afterwards, he returned every time he was in Chicago. Once he made a special visit to witness the christening of his grandson, Samuel.

He never spoke of this part of his life to Jenny unless she asked, and she rarely did. For Sam the apartment north of Chicago was a strangely pleasant place, but important only as a brief interval in the midst of days that belonged to Jenny Angel.

The train for Chicago jogged to a station stop. Some weary rider lurched down the aisle and out. Home, Sam hoped. At three a.m. a man going out into the drizzle ought to be heading home. The train growled and vibrated. Chicago, here we come again. At the end of this car Jenny was in an upper berth while Mollie snored below. Perhaps Jenny was awake, irked by the snores stimulated by the night's performance and by to-morrow's celebration, perplexed by Jerry, wondering what time it was. She always wanted to know the exact time, even when it didn't matter. She would be lying there, Sam imagined, straight and slender, her black eyes wide, her breasts against the sheet. . . . Sam gritted his teeth and turned over. He would be fifty in a couple of days. Too old, he told himself savagely, too late, too. He jerked his mind away and heard again the wheels, the whistle, the night music.

Jenny also heard the wheels and the whistle and the swish of rain. The sounds were familiar, but they were not soothing. Chicago to-morrow, the wheels warned. Chicago and the end of a decade. And what was so special about ten years except that it was a long time, a very long time

to belong to no one, to belong nowhere, and yet at the same time to belong to everyone, everywhere? She had what she wanted. Even while the rest were losing their last pennies and their last shreds of pride, she had prospered. She should be thankful. For what? She bit her lower lip fiercely and clenched her fists against her sides. Why had this secret, poisoned coldness entered her heart? Why now when all was well? Certainly she was somebody, just as she had foreseen back there in the Lighthouse Mission. She had worked hard, climbed straight up, with no detours, no cheating, no vacations except that summer in France. That had been fun, and Sam and Mollie deserved it; but she had been deliriously happy to get home, to be Jenny Angel again! The people had been glad too. The newly wounded, the bewildered wanted her. They answered when she called. She heard their sins and their struggles and loved them and blessed them there, and then moved on. She always moved on. "A nomad shepherdess," a florid reporter had once described her, "seeking out the scattered flocks." Nomad—with a train for a camel and a hotel for a tent. Nomad—wandering, rootless, afraid to remain, always hearing the trumpet over the next hill, in the next state. Ten years the trumpet had summoned her because the people were out there, and she must be with them who loved her.

Only she was tired now. Trains were harder to catch, her thoughts harder to gather, details harder to solve, churchmen and reporters harder to placate and to please. Only the people were the same. Lord have mercy on my people! But to them she was already a legend, the Scarlet Angel, and angels were a race apart, not of human stuff. And so Jenny was bitterly lonely those sleepless nights; but no one guessed. Not even Mollie and Sam suspected

the growing ache in her. Sam, you fool! Why couldn't you have loved me enough to take me anyway, possess me against all rule and regulation? Once in France I thought . . . She ground her fists against her smarting eyes. "All right, Jenny," she said evenly. "All right. He loves you with tenderness. You don't want tenderness. He loves you with kindness. Remember the last time he kissed you? That was for pity, Jen. Pity because Sam knows your failure. Sam knows Jerry."

Face it, Jen: A woman with a son would not be so lonely if the son didn't hate her. Trembling, she fumbled for an extra blanket. Forlornly she wooed sleep. Tomorrow she must look beautiful. Jenny grimaced in the dark, trying to put off Jerry, the lost child who didn't want to be found.

Twice he had run away from school. The first time the authorities had overtaken him within six hours; they found him doggedly plodding through New England slush. But he wouldn't say where he was going. "Just away," he muttered. "That's all. Just away."

The headmaster had summoned Jenny; but when he confronted her in his chaste, pipe-smoked den he had no solution. "The boy's moody. Bright, but moody. He'll get over it. Grow out of it here."

Jerry himself hated her being there. He was humiliated when his friends saw the famous Scarlet Angel claim him. He said nothing to her, absolutely nothing at all the whole afternoon. He stood, distant and sullen, and merely bowed when she said goodbye.

The second time was worse. Jerry, the headmaster reported by telephone, had vanished before morning chapel. The police suspected kidnapping. By midnight Jenny was eastbound again with Sam beside her. Radios

blared the story. The population, still reeling from the Lindbergh kidnapping, was deeply and noisily shocked. "Scarlet Angel's son lost," streamed across her latest photograph. "Grieving mother wants news of her missing boy." On the second day they added: "Reward for any information leading to Jerry Wyatt, son of Jenny Angel." Cranks phoned false leads. Neighbours walked sleepless through the surrounding woods. Visitors crisscrossed the neat lawns of the school and harassed the police and faculty. Kind offers, curious advice, malicious threats swamped the mail.

Stunned, Jenny Angel kept to her room. "He wasn't kidnapped," she told Sam wearily. "He ran away again."

Sam nodded.

"Why? Why did he do it? This is a wonderful school. Why does he hate—everything?"

"He's only a kid. And maybe a bit—well, melodramatic like his mother," he answered evasively. He knew better.

On the morning of the fourth day a farmer, trailing a vagrant cow in pastures ten miles north of town, discovered the small boy in tattered uniform resting on a sun-drenched rock under the June sky, munching green berries. When the farmer shouted to him across the brook Jerry came as far as the muddy bank and stopped, his face streaked with dirt and tears and berry juice, his expression at once scared and relieved.

"You the youngster they're looking for? You the son of Jenny Angel?" The farmer talked quietly, moved softly as if he dealt with a timid lamb.

"Yeah. I'm Jerry. I got lost. I'm hungry."

"Sure, lad, come with me." The farmer carried him to his truck, gave him an orange and a candy bar, and then drove him back to school. Handing him over to the nurse

at the infirmary he said: "Nice little feller. You should have seen him eat!" He refused the reward. "Glad to find the Scarlet Angel's boy." He chewed solemnly on his tobacco and regretted the hole in his overalls when the dozen photographers arrived.

Sam told Jenny her son was safe and shouldered her a path through the prying crowds.

Cleaned, fed, exhausted, Jerry lay on the high bed and forbade her with his frigid gaze to come nearer. When she stooped to kiss him he took refuge behind a pillow.

Helpless, she said, "I'm glad you're safe." She retreated to the foot of his bed. "Jerry, why did you run away?"

"I got lost."

"Is that all?"

"I got lost," he repeated stubbornly.

After a while she tried again. "I think you ran away."

"So what?"

"You upset a lot of people."

"Why?"

"Why, we love you. We were afraid you were hurt."

An almost cruel smile creased his mouth. "Yeah."

"I don't know what to say, Jerry. Only I'm glad you're safe." It was pathetically inadequate, but it was all she could manage. "Jerry, we came as soon as we heard. I—"

"Is Sam here?" he interrupted.

"Yes."

"I'd like to see Sam."

"But I—I'll get him." Numb with rejection and frustration, she stumbled against Sam, who waited in the hall.

"Oh, he's all right. He wants to see you." Then she added tonelessly, "You know, Sam, I don't think he even likes me."

In pity Sam's hands steadied her quivering shoulders.
In pity he kissed her.

"I'm his mother, Sam."

"I know." He thumbed through the pile of comic books he had brought. "I'll go see him." He paused before opening the door. "You shouldn't be surprised, Jenny," he reminded her soberly, "You don't love him either."

Later she could hear them laughing together, and she felt vanquished; but whether it was by the boy or by herself, she didn't quite know.

A woman with a son should not be lonely, she repeated to herself. But if there was no love? Or understanding? Or companionship? She had tried. These two years she had earnestly tried to charm Jerry as she charmed a thousand, thousand others with her radiance and warmth and attention. But he was not deceived. Last month in Cleveland, just before school, she had suggested a ball game. He had almost grinned before he answered calmly: "Aw, cut it! I'll give you A for effort, but it's too late. That's all. I'd rather go with Sam." After that he was gone again, and she had to admit she was relieved.

So here she was now on the eve of her tenth anniversary. Good Lord, she must sleep, or to-morrow she would seem as tired and old as she was. For she was tired these days, tired to the very bone marrow and nerve tips. Soon not even black coffee or the trumpet's call would keep her going. Ah, but the people waiting, the people yearning—that would always banish her weariness, wouldn't it?

In the berth below, Mollie heaved and shuddered. The snores became snorts. "For God's sake, Moll, stop it!" Jenny cried aloud. But Mollie was safe from noticing. Resignedly, she climbed down, and rolled Mollie over on to her side. The snoring spiralled down into a sigh as Mollie

slept on. Affectionately, Jenny patted the brush of white hair. "Sorry, Moll. You must be tired too."

Swaying with the car, she leaned across Mollie to look through the rain-splashed window. No life outside, nothing but rain and darkness and movement—constant movement. Once she had loved it, but not now. Oh, God, to stop awhile! But no, she was the nomad shepherdess after scattered sheep. Who cared? The sheep? God? What God? The train lurched, tossing her head against the berth above. Unsteadily she crawled back to her berth. Just to stop. To stay. To take root. She pulled the covers over her and lay rigid at the sudden clamouring question. Why not? Stop and call the people to wherever she was. They would come. Bring me the sheep, Lord, bring me the sheep. I'll build a shining temple under the warm sun, between the mountains and the sea, near my people. They'll come. A Temple of Light for my resting place. Why not? Sam, Mollie, why not? There were funds to start; there must be a place. To-morrow she would tell them. In Chicago she would announce it. After ten years the Scarlet Angel would build a home. Everybody, the scattered sheep, maybe even Jerry, everybody would come to a Temple of Light set upon a hill.

Jenny relaxed. Her mind, no longer tormented by memories, was content, caught up in this new drive. Idly she listened to the rhythm of train wheels, to the whistle politely acknowledging a deserted station. To-morrow and to-morrow and to-morrow the nights would be quiet and still somewhere, for there she would create a temple that could not be moved.

Chapter two

UNDER misty skies the highway overtook the city limits and ran north along the ocean's shore, sometimes slicing off a cliff above the shining waters, sometimes curving inland to catch the neat little towns. A thousand vehicles used the highway every day. Enormous trucks hauled anything from lettuce heads and prunes to iron ingots and oil; polished sedans sped by; jalopies overloaded with skinny children and skinnier dogs rattled on endlessly—all moving because this was a time of seeking and wanting, seeking work in fields and orchards, wanting pleasure, seeking escape from now, from pain, wanting promises and honey and gold and to-morrow. In the thirties everyone was looking for something. Even Jenny Angel.

That spring afternoon in San Francisco, Sam hired a car, and the three of them headed north to look for the site of their temple. In the same way, they had set out from half a hundred cities across America until Jenny had grown sick with failures. Circles smudged her eyes, and occasionally her voice betrayed her fatigue; but she kept on looking. She had imbued both Sam and Mollie with

her earliest enthusiasm, so that all winter they spoke of little else. "The promised land!" Mollie exclaimed. "We'll find it." But they were fussy. The temple must be located near a city but not in it; it must be on a highway and a bus line so that people could come. The land must be inexpensive and convenient to workmen. It must be lovely also, worthy of the Lord and Jenny Angel. When they saw it, Mollie remarked more than once, they would know it instantly for their own. By some mystic alchemy of spirit they would be sure. Sam left that to the women. He merely asked the price and drove them off to look again as he was driving now.

The traffic lessened somewhat. To the left the sea shimmered where the sun broke through the mist. To the right the hot dog and billboard fringes of a town nestled under the shadow of a hill. On the back seat of the car Mollie slept, her round straw hat awry, her glasses slipping. Homely old soul, Sam thought not unkindly. Her looks don't improve with age, nor her disposition either. God certainly moved in mysterious ways when he appointed her caretaker to the Scarlet Angel. He glanced sideways at Jenny. She was unusually silent, yet alert, braced against the car door, her eyes strained with searching out the roadside, her face flushed with sudden recognition. Then Sam saw it, and he too knew; with throat-gagging certainty, he knew. Here was the place.

At a crossroads bus stop a white sign announced: "Welcome to Olivet. Rotary meets Tuesday at noon, Lions Club Wednesday at six." Over the next rise, Sam thought, there would be a flash of sea and a large sloping field and home. God Almighty, how could a man know what he had never seen?

Jenny's hand gripped his knee when they came to the

field, broad and gentle and graced with a few pines.

"Stop, Sam."

"Yes, I know."

Sam stayed in Olivet while Jenny and Mollie finished the tour. He got in touch with real estate dealers and contractors. The town fathers of Olivet welcomed him as a man of authority and knowledge who wanted to build, who had the means to provide work and wages and a future. Why, he was a godsend! Under their admiration Sam waxed strong in spirit and in body. On the day that Jenny was to return he noted his altered image in the shaving mirror, cried aloud, "Thank God," and raced down the hotel steps like a young man going to meet his love.

The whole town of Olivet was equally giddy with anticipation and pride that the Scarlet Angel would dwell there. Zestfully the Chamber of Commerce planned on tourists and pilgrims who would want to eat, to sleep, to buy souvenirs, to sight-see. Cheerfully the townsfolk scrubbed windows, clipped lawns, and swept sidewalks. When Jenny arrived, they lined the streets and the main square while the high-school band hailed her and small girls pitched petals in her path. She didn't disappoint them. Emerging from her hired car, she smiled and waved and threw kisses all the way into the flower-drugged hotel lobby. She was so tall, they noticed, so queenly, so beautiful wearing summer blue with a rose at her throat. The young florist, squeezed against an awning pole, saw the rose and knew suddenly and joyously that he had discovered his way of making a special offering to her. When the cornerstone of the temple was laid on a golden fresh morning Jenny Angel held the shovel, and delighted the

photographers by graciously accepting a single rose, her own, darker than flame but brighter than crimson, the Scarlet Angel rose.

Every morning Jenny woke in the same bed, viewed the same scenes through the same casements, and greeted Mollie through the same door. After ten years of travel she felt a strangeness in this constancy of familiar things and a great contentment.

"Am I getting old, Moll, to like settling down?" she asked.

"Well, you're no young chicken, Jen—that's a fact now. A woman passing thirty enters her prime, they say. You're on top, Angel. This is it." Mollie brandished the hair brush at the sketches of the Temple of Light thumbtacked alongside the dressing table.

Jenny glowed. Every day she studied those sketches and the architect's blueprints. Every day she chose colours and materials and then changed her mind and chose again. Every day she tramped in the dust amid the bulldozers and labourers and watched the foundation being laid, stone by stone. Such was her pleasure that wherever she went, she diffused sheer joy. Townsppeople, workers, strangers meeting her, borrowed portions of it for themselves and wished her glory.

Sam's delight was greatest of all. These days he could accomplish anything effortlessly, magnificently, because Jenny was with him, depending on him, so close. The spark that he had never quite extinguished burned again like a hot coal. Jenny, my angel, mine! But he was wise now and careful in his waiting. Together he and Jenny would build the temple. Together, he thought, always together. He explained to her the drawings and benches and sewer

pipes, and chuckled at her greediness for the least detail. He built the temple in love because he believed, deeply, recklessly, and unreasonably, that when it was finished Jenny would be his.

From the day of the breaking of the ground, Jenny knew how the temple was going to be. She knew every graceful line of grey, upthrusting stone that would one day mount high and impregnable against the sky, outmatching the rival mountains, outlasting the rival sea. The style was modern Gothic, Sam said. The temple itself would be a massive structure, a tremendous sweep of shadowy space with stained-glass windows, movie-house chairs, broad aisles, and double balconies. The front was designed as half-chancel with golden cross and candles, choir loft and pulpit, and half-stage with theatrical lights and changeable backdrop. Three steps down was the place where the converts could publicly kneel to Jenny's ministrations.

The temple would occupy the left side of the whole projected square. In an open cloister across the front visitors might bask on benches, enjoy the cooling fountains and the gardens. In the other three-storied buildings flanking the court would be workrooms, classrooms, meeting halls, choir rooms, clubrooms and offices, and, finally, the living quarters. Jenny planned her private apartment with bedrooms for herself and Mollie, living-room, tiled bath and kitchen, and, beyond, a pine-panelled den for Jerry when—and if—he came. Down the outer hall, with a separate entrance, Sam would have his suite.

The Temple of Light gradually took size and shape, and the building of it was the best time either Jenny or Sam had ever known. When the actual construction didn't need them or, more accurately, when they didn't need it, they rode up into the mountains, roamed in the city or

swam from their own beach across the highway. They established a togetherness that was like a silver chain binding them in one purpose, one pleasure. On a star-heavy night as they lay side by side in the sand, Jenny recognized this togetherness and wondered. Old phrases drifted across her mind. Sam, so good, so kind. Sam, safe, warm, steady. Sam. Perhaps this companionship was the way of love, serene and stable. Perhaps love was not, as she had imagined, passionate, tearing and sweetly terrible. Was that for the very young? Had she missed it? Now was love like this, like Sam? In the dark she caught his hand, heard him gasp and roll toward her, his free hand caressing her hair. Quiet now and yielding, Jenny tipped her face to him, but when he kissed her she turned her mouth away. Her cheek was soft to his lips but unresponsive. Sam tried to warn himself. She's not ready. Oh, God, wait, wait! Lest his trembling body betray him, he sprang up, pulling her after him, and rushed into the saving, cool waters. Wait, Sam, wait. God, how long?

When the apartment was ready, Jenny, with an awed and ecstatic Mollie trotting behind, entered her first real home. All that day she paced her own wide-windowed, spacious rooms, green and grey, sparked with flamingo or amber. She admired the blond furniture and all the new trappings and felt, for all her expectations, a little surprised and awkward at coming home, but not sorry. Not yet.

The blissful days rolled on. The temple took living shape, and Jenny smiled. In his heart Sam grew bolder and dared to dream of staying here, with Jen, forever. Only Mollie, who understood the Angel best, sensed the danger lurking in an overdose of contentment. Jenny, she knew, was created for battle, not for too much resting. Nightly in the last weeks of that summer, Mollie consulted

the Lord and fancied that He agreed with her. It was high time for Jenny to be about His business. Finally she stated her opinion bluntly: "You've had enough of setting, Jen. You ought to be out talking up the Lord's work. Folks need you."

For a long space Jenny sat as if she had not heard. Mollie listened to the travel clock ticking on the bedstand, saw her slim fingers curl into fists and the colour rise in her tanned cheeks.

Then Jenny spoke, humbly: "You're right, Moll. I need to be preaching. Only—only, I don't want to leave the temple."

Mollie had a solution: "Every morning on the radio I hear these preachers. Not one can hold a candle to you, Jenny Angel, but people listen. Now, there's a radio station in town. They'd be tickled if you'd go down and talk on it." She paused shrewdly. "Think of all the people that could hear you. All the folks that never saw you. They could hear you, Jen."

Jenny pondered a long moment. "Yes, Mollie, I could do it. I could talk to my people over the radio."

Mollie settled back, half pleased, half sorry as the quietness died in Jenny, yielding to a vivid fire.

"All those people! Mollie, thanks. I love you!" The skyrocket shot off again, streaming bright and beyond, leaving them all behind. And Mollie wondered an instant whether she had done the right thing or the wrong to break the Angel's private peace.

At the start Jenny was blocked by the blank insensibility of the microphone; but when she heard Rudy's trumpet she conjured up a thousand faces she had seen, and spoke to them. After that nothing could stop her. Fascinated, she

learned to project herself through space into human hearts. They listened and wrote their testimonies.

One said: "I'm a widow with two children. Yesterday I figured they'd be better off with me dead. Then I heard you, and honest to God, I got right down and prayed, and before I said 'Amen' the landlady showed up wanting to know if I'd wait tables for her. We all pray for you. Miss Angel, me and the kids."

Another: "We're an old couple. The Mrs. is pretty sickly. We live in a house rotten run down like me, and we eat off the town. I'm pretty broke up but this p.m. I heard you say God don't forget no one. So maybe there is hope somewhere."

And a third: "I'm twenty up here at the T.B. San, where I been hating everything like crazy. An old guy in the next bed had a radio on, and I heard you. I'm telling you maybe the world's not so bad after all, so long as you're in it."

Reading the letters, Jenny was shocked. They laid on her a responsibility to which she was not equal, and she knew it. The situation was like that, years back, when the papers had trumped up faith healing. Once more she refused to wade beyond her depth. "I won't do it, Moll," she said firmly. "Those people set their lives by me, like clocks by the sun. I can't do it. I'm scared." She pushed the remaining letters from her.

Mollie, unperturbed, continued opening letters. "You got no call to be scared. You got no call even to be surprised. People been acting like that ten years. You've been talking; they've been feeling. What did you expect?"

"That was different. They came because they wanted to. They went away. So did I. I never knew more. Here I go right into their homes."

"So they can shut you off," Mollie snorted. "Besides, like I said, you already changed a million lives like these." She held up a bunch of letters. "Only you didn't know for sure."

"I didn't know. That's it. And I don't want to. I'll stop radio."

Mollie had seen her like this before. It didn't make much sense, standing against her own work this way, but she herself knew better than to argue. She rose briskly, fashioned a basket from her skirt front, and swept all the mail into it. "So you don't have to know. We'll get a secretary, and she and I can figure this stuff out. You just keep on the radio talking. That's all."

Jenny laughed suddenly. Of course, a secretary to answer letters properly! She would still feel the power and create the drama, but the heartaches and the responsibility would be removed. If she didn't know . . . Good old Moll! Her laughter rippled like flute notes.

Mollie sighed. Letters bunched against her stomach, her violent pink slip fluttering against her fleshy legs, she walked away with a shake of the head.

To Jenny the radio was rich and rewarding; but it was not enough. She knew her people were out there, but she yearned to see them again, to acknowledge their adoration. Sam, reluctant but resigned, hired a circus tent, rented folding chairs from three funeral parlours, borrowed a local choir. One hot September evening, Jenny Angel awaited her followers on the flat field behind the unfinished temple. Sweetly, imperiously, Rudy's trumpet heralded her coming.

Afterwards, on Sundays, Wednesdays, and Fridays, the roads into Olivet were clogged with the cars of the curious, the lonely, the thrill-seekers, the God-seekers, and all their families. Jenny Angel had indeed come home.

Chapter three

ALL winter the stony splendour of the temple rose higher and higher. Twice Jenny journeyed to the East to preach and to raise money. On one trip she lunched with Jerry in a prim Connecticut inn where they were overly polite at table and very tired at parting. On the second trip she saw Martha Wilcox although she didn't know it.

Martha, having chosen the second balcony as a point from which to study Jenny, through opera glasses, acknowledged without reservation that Sam had reason for staying away.

Sam himself could hardly bear Jenny's absences. Both the heart of the temple and the sun of the land vanished with her so that life itself seemed suspended and inert. When she returned he had to show her everything, to tell her everything that had occurred, from the flowering of the least blossom to the installing of the pipe organ. He conducted these excursions, glad because she was there but inwardly jealous of flower and organ and silently begging: "Look at me—Sam. Remember?"

One early twilight, after her second home-coming, Sam led her along the gravelled driveway to a pair of stone pedestals that stood ready to receive the angels whose

torches would forever signal passers-by from the highway into the temple gates. Perched atop the solid cement, they watched the flickering headlights of old cars and half-ton trucks rumbling down the highway.

"So they still come?" Jenny asked.

"Who? Oh, the migrants. Yes. They follow the crops. Not much of a life." Sam was sorry for them, but to-night he resented any intrusion. He reached for her hand as he tried to tell her how, when she was away, the soul of the whole place shrivelled.

"I know, Sam. I belong here. I never belonged anywhere else."

"I belong too. Jen—Jen?"

"Yes?" She had eluded him again. "Those people. I've been thinking. You know we could use a few of them right here—painting, cleaning, gardening. It might help."

Rebuffed, he retorted acidly: "You were never one for charity."

"It wouldn't be charity," she argued patiently. "They would work. Someone has to. Why not?"

"Jenny, please." He was inarticulate in his love.

"To-morrow you can put out a sign or whatever you think best. I'll leave it to you. O.K.?" She slid to the edge of the pedestal and dropped quickly to the ground. "Come on. It's late."

Sullen in his disappointment, Sam plodded beside her. Sensing his pique, she stopped before his door and impulsively kissed him on the chin.

"You are a lamb," she said, and left him.

For a long time Sam sat disturbed and pondering. Was it better to be a lamb than nothing?

In the morning he did as she asked: he invited the migrant families in but screened them cautiously. Within

a week eight displaced farm families were tenting at the rear of the temple grounds, where a fresh spring bubbled and a clump of pines gave shade. At services Jenny requested old clothes and canned foods, and when the collection barrels filled she took delight in playing Lady Bountiful to the grateful people. Meanwhile, the temple lawns were expertly rolled and seeded, the garden planted and tended, the halls painted. Men in overalls, women in faded cottons, and children in mended play clothes staked out humble homes in the midst of increasing grandeur. Often on clear nights their singing, to the accompaniment of a lone guitar and Rudy's trumpet, drew Jenny. Sometimes she went to lead the square dancing on the parking lot, sometimes just to play a little as she had not played since girlhood in the Boston streets. Mollie developed cronies among the farm women who helped her sort clothes and canned goods; they mended and chatted and drank tea together. Sam found gardeners and painters but not friends. He went mainly to ward off the overzealous reporters who delighted in human interest stories of Jenny dancing with the teen-agers, consoling a whimpering infant, visiting with the womenfolk. It was good copy, and they made the most of it. The news of Jenny Angel's "migrant camp" spread eastward and met with grudging approval in the same unexpected places that had applauded her stand for Rudy years ago in Georgia. Again, people who usually mocked her preaching would commend her "social planning," unaware of any connection.

Sam read the articles and told Mollie: "She's still got the damnedest luck ever!"

She reproved him. "I told you, Sam. It's not luck. It's the Lord. He's got reasons."

"You mean the Lord has reasons for sending the

migrants here? Why, I thought I picked them myself.”
“He’s got reasons,” she maintained stubbornly.
“Does He always have reasons, Moll?”
“For Jenny Angel, yes. For us, I don’t know.”

One night when the air was heavy Jenny couldn’t sleep. That evening she and Sam had threshed out the last details in preparation for the dedication of the Temple of Light. Suddenly she was appalled at the size of her project: “Can we swing it, Sam?”

“With you, Jenny, of course,” he replied sincerely, and she believed him. The lamp had silvered his hair, etched the lines about his mouth.

Dear Sam, she thought as she lay in bed, the Temple of Light is as much yours as mine. She wished she could go to him, say “Thank you” and “Help me, will you, Sam?” and maybe cry a little. The excitement, the work, the heat were stretching her nerves taut. The temple was so big, so demanding! But Sam was probably asleep by now. Well, leave him in peace.

She rose, dressed, and went down and out across the courtyard with its splashing fountains, its newly turned loam. Soon there would be flowers and birds and benches and people. No one would remember the bare field that had been here before she came. Before Jenny Angel. She chose to sit on the stone steps of the tower facing the sweep of lawn to the highway. The night covered the green and lovely land like a thick carpet. Quietness, so intense that it seemed alive, penetrated everything, the trees, the grass, even the temple stones. Jenny opened her mouth and drew in the quietness with the night air. The taste was good, the tranquillity of the earth itself and of the temple that rose out of the earth.

She rubbed her palms against the cool, smooth stones and thought of Sam again. Without him she would be lost in this new life. Without his kindness, his patience, she might even now explode into nothingness. "Steady me, Sam," she whispered. "Take care of me, please." So real was he at that moment that when footsteps crackled on the gravel, she called out his name. "Sam?"

"No. It's not Sam." The apparition emerging from the dimness was slight, ramrod-straight, with bushy brows, hawklike nose, and wrinkled cheeks. Staring at him she had a strange sense of recognition, as if somehow she had been expecting him. Surely she had met him before, in an audience, among the workers, or perhaps in the pages of the Old Testament, for he had the stern look of a prophet mellowed by mercy.

"Hello," she said, and invited him to share the steps.

Stiffly he lowered himself beside her. "Hot night. The sea out there looks fine." His voice rolled melodiously deep and, somehow, familiar.

She eyed him tentatively. "Do you often walk at night?"

"At my age night and day don't matter much. Sleep's a rare thing. Yes, I walk often in the dark."

"Do I know you? Who are you? Where do you come from?"

He answered explicitly as if it were important for her to know: "I'm Ben Hayes. Some call me Pastor Ben since I been in the Lord's service fifty years. Back East after Princeton I had fine churches." He sounded wistful. "My wife died and my boy. A man loses heart, and he gets old. That was long ago. The Lord's come back to me since. I was at a little place in Dakota marrying and burying and preaching a bit. Good folks. When the whole place blew away, I came along west with the Petersons. I'm down in

the tents. He hesitated and then added gracefully. "I'd like to say thank you, mam, for giving these folks a place to root. Good earth belongs to them. I—I talk too much. An old man gabbing, Miss Angel."

Humble, harmless, eyes bent on the bony hands locked across his knees, he was an old man calling up sympathy.

"You went to Princeton. You were a minister. Maybe you can help me," she said gently.

"You, Miss Angel? But I have heard you. You have a magic. People believe because of you. You give them courage, faith."

"To the people, yes. To myself? I . . ." There in the small dew-damp hours before the dawn Jenny Angel heard herself unaccountably pouring out secrets never before shared, the prayers forever unanswered, the absence of any God, the loneliness, the Boston slums, the Light-house, the tours, the half-lost son, the doubt, the fears. When she stopped she was shaken but not sorry. "But of course," she added quickly, "there are the people. When I'm out there I have all the answers. Then it's easy."

"Jenny Angel," he mused, "the Scarlet Angel. I've seen your face across half the country, I guess. Doubt, child, is a common thing. And fear, too. But this other, this not believing when you're alone. Now there's a sad thing. God mostly talks to us one by one."

"Not to me. He only sees me in a crowd. I—Would you talk to me, Ben? Would you teach me out of books and out of your experience?"

She turned to him in the moonlight, the human whom they called Angel, the lovely woman who was adored by thousands. Old Ben Hayes felt a wetness on his face. It was an odd, uncommon thing, meeting her like this on the night he had meant to disappear, on the very night he

thought the Lord had summoned him at last. Well, he had misread the summons because he knew he must stay with the Scarlet Angel.

"Yes," he told her, "yes. To-morrow I will bring some books. I've loved books all my life. We'll talk of many things. Perhaps an old man's wisdom . . ."

He let the rest go. She had risen tall above him, ethereal against the heavy carving of the temple door—scarcely earthbound, he thought, but not of heaven either. Not quite of heaven.

"To-morrow at ten," she said. "I'll see you then."

Every day at nine-thirty Jenny closed her study door against the world. In this refuge she felt safe, strong, supreme as the legend of the Scarlet Angel would have her feel. The uncluttered lines of the lime-green walls soothed her. The clean strokes of the seascape above the fireplace refreshed her. Small-paneled casement windows filtering sun past a sheltered garden brightened her. The formal draperies and the couch coverings dyed to match the Scarlet Angel roses flattered her. The study was not meant either to project or to complement her own vivid, dynamic personality. Instead, it was meant to supply the serenity and the composure she needed.

Seated this day behind the outsize desk, she rested her eyes on the gentle greens. Soon Ben would knock as he had knocked for three weeks now, coming to tell of old masters and young philosophers, to share with her his instinctive wisdom and his conscious knowledge.

She had proved to be an apt pupil, responding diligently, realizing at last her shallowness of thinking, and old Ben, as the teacher, marvelled to see her mind grasp erudite teachings and adapt them dramatically to the

needs of her people—her followers would have been stunned to know she taught them Plato and Augustine. Her special gift was to make all things, all ideas, uniquely and unalterably her own. Ben was half aghast, half amused at her preaching these days; she was entirely moved by the people's response. They loved her; they understood her; they believed her. He saw that clearly, and was humble in the fact that he, so late, could be an instrument to shape her.

This morning he arrived on the stroke of ten, as was his habit. She reported on her assignments; then, without preliminaries, she spoke of prayer.

"You believe in prayer, Ben?"

He remembered the old lady next to him last night who had sworn she heard the Lord himself answering when Jenny prayed. He remembered also that, to Jenny, God spoke only when an ample audience was about. And he was troubled. "A man talks to God. God answers. I guess pretty often God says No. That's fair enough." His blue-veined fingers thoughtfully smoothed the worn spot on his trousers. His eyes probed Jenny's face.

"And quite often He disappears. I know. But, Ben, listen. In the temple there's a special room with telephones because I believe there are hundreds of people—like me—who need others to speak to God for them. Anyone can call here, Ben, and say: 'I'm in a mess. Pray for me. Help me.' Or maybe they're lonely and want to talk, or scared and want assurance. Would you be there, Ben, in that room?"

He stared at her unbelievingly. Oh, God, the end would be even better than the beginning. "I'm old, Jenny."

"You could have all the help you want. You choose it, run it. Please, Ben. It would be the Room of Light, don't

you see, a symbol of the whole temple—sending out light and hope maybe!"

A man lives the best way he can, he thought, and he doesn't do God or himself much good in seventy full years of trying; then, when he ought to be dead, this comes, this woman, this Angel, this—

Jenny tapped his arm, and he wondered if she knew how he quivered.

"Please, Ben."

"I accepted way back," he replied simply, "when you first spoke."

"Good. The place is ready. You can start to-day. I—I—Ben, when you go up now, start with a prayer for me. My—my son is coming for a few days. I'm scared. He doesn't like me, you know. It's difficult." There, she had put the truth into words, confessed her helplessness. She met Ben's eyes squarely and read sympathy in them.

"And you, you love your son?"

She did not flinch. "I don't know. He's a stranger."

Ben opened the door, hesitating, "I'll go and pray now. I'll start at once."

But Ben's prayers, Mollie's hopes, Sam's efforts, and Jenny's own determination availed nothing. Jerry arrived, taller than they recalled, beautiful in features as his mother was beautiful but with a characteristic coldness alongside her warmth. He was as impersonal as a cameo, making small talk at meals because he was a gentleman, permitting himself laughter on the beach, sightseeing because he went with Sam, but treating Mollie as a servant and Ben as a queer soul. Jenny began to count the days to his departure, resolutely enduring them to the end.

On Wednesday morning, without warning, Jerry appeared in her study. She thrust her books aside and, warily,

unwillingly felt her heart leap to welcome her son. Perhaps some miracle, some prayer . . .

In blue school blazer and flannel trousers correctly unpressed, Jerry lounged on the white leather chair, aping nonchalance. He spoke of the weather and the gardens, while Jenny, studying him, saw herself at fourteen, defiant, hiding behind her own inner barrier, untouched as Jerry seemed untouchable now. Casually he snapped off a rosebud and fondled its velvet with his thumb.

"Well," Jenny said finally, "you had a purpose in coming here, didn't you?"

"Yes. I don't want to go to the service to-night." He delivered his words evenly although he savagely crumpled the rose petals. She noticed how scrubbed his hands were, how trim the nails, how properly kept.

"Why?" He had missed one night by staying late in the city. Foolishly, of course, she had hoped that if he could see her out there, hear her, feel the people admiring her, he might be able to find in her some good quality. "Why?"

"I don't take to that kind of thing."

"So?"

"No. It's ridiculous really, ranting and roaring like that for God. More like a circus. No dignity. I'm going to be an Episcopalian. Besides, I don't like the silly spectacle you make of yourself. And, frankly, I don't like those people that come. Like Mollie and Ben. Common. Pretty ordinary people. I don't belong with them really."

Anger, purged of all hope and patience, tore through Jenny. She stood up slowly. "You snob! You arrogant little snob. What stupid, cold-blooded master taught you this—that your kind is better than my kind? Where in heaven's name do you think you came from? You are my

son, whether you like it or not, and you came out of the slums, and God help you if you're ashamed of it. You—you——”

Before his mother's fury Jerry became ashen. “Don't say that,” he begged stubbornly. “I won't go. I don't belong.” He gritted his teeth and flung himself into hatred for his mother. His storm-black eyes warned her.

Abruptly Jenny turned her back on him. Outside the window Peterson was spraying the lawns, and Sam was supervising the laying of a brick wall. He's only a child, she repeated to herself. He knows only what the school has taught, and I put him there. God help us both! Quiet and tearless, she waited for his anger to run out. Behind her then a muffled gulp broke the silence. Once again a small boy hurt by himself, hurt by his mother, hurt by a dozen things he could never name, Jerry tugged out his handkerchief and blew noisily. He belonged at school, not here, not with this woman. When he looked at her through wet fingers he had an impulse to run to her, to bury his face against her; but another impulse, stern, proud, impregnable, battled against this. He struggled to hold back his sobs.

“There's a train east to-night, Jerry. Sam could take you in. You could have dinner at Chinatown first. You'd like that. Do you want to go?”

“Yes.” He had moved to the door, his face downcast, young but defiant.

She thought wearily that she must let him go without humiliating either of them further. “We don't need to be enemies, Jerry. I think you'll stop being a snob one day when you know people better. Even a gentleman”—she hesitated over the irony—“even a gentleman is kind.” He must go now, she decided, while she had control. “Goodbye,

Jerry," she said. "Come again. There'll always be a room for you."

"Thank you, mam," he answered politely as though she were a salesman offering a piece of cheese. "Goodbye." He plunged out of the room blindly because of tears.

Jenny went to her telephone and dialled Ben. She said unsteadily: "I'm upset. Please."

"Yes." Ben in the prayer room knew what to do because he had just seen a boy running away. "O God," he began.

By radio, press, and handbills several million people were informed that the Temple of Light would be dedicated the first Sunday in October. The town of Olivet was prepared, from hamburger stand to hotel, from traffic police to town officials. On the temple grounds Jenny strode jubilantly through the organized confusion. She strolled along corridors of bustling activity, past the women adjusting choir robes, the high schoolers rehearsing their band, the choir carolling lustily.

As the last workman departed she felt tears in her throat, less for the achievement of the long expected than for the conclusion of the building days, the happy, creative days. Vast, dim, hushed the cathedral itself waited. The late sun glistened crimson and azure through arched side windows and picked out the golden cross, the gigantic organ pipes, the naked machinery of the radio set-up. Ready, the temple waited for Jenny Angel to give it life.

"It's finished, Sam," she murmured. "It's the end."

In the temple's twilight Sam felt chilled. "God, no, Jen! It's the beginning." Almost roughly he pulled her against him. "The dedication is a beginning."

A half-hour before the ceremony, the parking lots were jammed, the traffic police frantic with the oncoming

stream of cars. Harassed ushers, attired in navy blue with identifying roses, firmly shepherded the protesting on to temporary benches in halls and cloak rooms. On the lower lawn the uniformed band entertained enthusiastically. In minutes the great heart of the Temple of Light would begin to beat officially.

Jenny Angel, alone in her study, was experiencing an acute case of nerves. Trembling, terrified, her mind blank of her planned message, she could not reconcile her stricken self with the Scarlet Angel. A hundred horns honked outside. A thousand voices chattered past. The organ rumbled. The big night, the Dedication when the Angel would, of course, arrive in glory. Ha! She was bitterly scornful of herself. Twelve years and she had never had such stage fright. Why to-night?

Irritably she wandered into the dressing room and began deftly applying make-up. At least the face was right, the high-boned cheeks, the dark eyes envied by movie stars, beloved by the people. Beloved! She pressed the lipstick red against her lips. Yes, beloved!

Mollie appeared bearing the white Bible and the scarlet rose. "Remember the first time, Jenny, back at the Light-house, and all those bums? We've come a pretty ways since then." She slipped the white robe over Jenny's shoulders and hooked the scarlet cape in place, crooning the while, off tune but lovingly, like a mother easing an agitated child. "They're just your folks out there, Jen. And the Lord is with you like before." She broke off to wipe her nose, and Jenny noticed that Mollie was sniffing as she always sniffled when her mounting ecstasy omened a crowning glory of a night.

"It's all right now, Mollie," Jenny assured her. And, quite suddenly, it was all right.

Sam called: "It's time, Jenny. Come on."

From the wings she beheld the banks of ferns and roses, the tinted spotlights intertwining, expecting her. The organ mellowed. A signal light flashed red. Now is the beginning. The trumpet sang; quick, high, triumphant notes announcing to the people their queen, their love. She went to them. "My people, to-night . . ." And the great temple was alive.

Book four

Chapter one

DAY and night the stone angels welcomed all who passed into the temple grounds. The naked were clothed; the hungry, fed; the lonely, entertained; the sinners, saved. The legend of the Scarlet Angel flamed brighter and farther than ever, while the weeks multiplied into months, into a year, and then into two years. Jenny found herself ensnared in the intricate weavings of temple business. Daily she plodded the treadmill from apartment to study to temple, round and round, unprotected, unrelieved because there was no substitute for the Scarlet Angel: she was captive of her own creation. After many months a slow-burning resentment began to smoulder in her. Sensing it, Sam bought her a Wedgwood-blue Cadillac and ordered her off the grounds for a while each day. She obeyed, driving alone and with rash abandon, up into the mountains, down the hairpin turns until she had spent some of her frustration and repressed rage and could return smiling graciously like the Scarlet Angel. But the Cadillac wasn't enough.

"I feel so—so caught!" she tried to explain to Sam one afternoon. "I built this life. I love the preaching and the people. I do, Sam. But they've made me a saint, their

private saint. And I'm not. Oh, Sam, I want to be free sometimes. Just free!"

"They love you," Sam reminded her as if that excused everything.

"Not me—what they make of me."

"You are what they make of you. Or, rather, they make of you what you ask them to, Jen."

They were in her car sipping hot coffee from paper cups. As he talked Sam crumpled his empty cup and rolled it back and forth between his thumb and forefinger. Quietly, he told her what he had often told her in these months. Sometimes she was pleased and softened, sometimes annoyed—he never knew ahead of time.

"Anyway," he said, "I love you, Jenny, whoever and whatever you are."

"I know. I know. No, Sam, don't"—at the arm he had dropped lightly across her shoulders. "Not now."

"Sorry," he apologized tonelessly.

"Oh, for heaven's sake, don't be so difficult!" Lord, why couldn't he or anyone else understand that she had to be let alone? Not chained and fettered and eternally bound to this or that. Savagely she switched on the engine. With the wheel between her hands, the power underfoot, speed in her hair, she could think better. Poor Sam! Maybe he had a right to his resentment, but so did she. "Damn," she whispered, and the car responded with whistling tires. Woods and towns and sea whipped by until ahead of them they saw again the temple crowning its hill, mammoth yet graceful, drawing all eyes up to itself and beyond. "Home," she said wryly. "Cosy, isn't it?"

"You know you love it," Sam reproved her. "It's yours."

"Sure. I know."

But to-day she knew many other things also: reborn

discontent, lasting unfulfilment, and returned longing. To-day she had admitted that the Temple of Light had not, after all, been her answer. That morning in the study she had asked Ben if there were anything worse than this: the seeking, the long, unstinted seeking, and then the certainty that you had found the treasure—whatever it might be—and, after that, the awful knowledge that it was gone, absolutely, irretrievably gone, and you were back in emptiness again. Was there any sorrow like that? Ben had been long in answering, and the answer that finally came didn't seem pertinent. She remembered: "When you have adoration and power and material goods in plenty, you have to pay the price for them. Neither God nor Satan sells cheap." And what did Ben think the price was for what she had? Herself? That was what she gave now in the name of God. And where had the happiness gone? What had become of peace?

She spun the car between the gates and roared up the drive. "Home, Sam," she repeated.

Mollie summoned the council of war in Sam's office and stated the facts as she saw them. "Jenny's bored with the same thing over and over. And disappointed too. Same place, people, radio, talking, all the time. Every day the same. She's got money and power and fame. So what? She's tired. Maybe she needs a vacation. Maybe we should go on the road again." Her knowing eyes measured Sam and Ben. "I've known her longer than anybody. She's special, Jen is, and the Lord's with her and all, but she—she gets restless. She doesn't satisfy easy. Maybe a tour like I said—"

"No," Sam interrupted. "We can't spare her. She's the soul of the Temple of Light. You know it, Ben."

Ben Hayes strolled to the window and scanned the green slope running down to the stone angels. With his back to them he spoke in a low voice. "To us she is indispensable. But the temple can get along without her now. To the people, the idea of her is enough."

Mollie blanched, and Sam swore. "You're crazy, Ben. They need her."

"The people worship her, but all of us can spare our gods in person so long as we have the symbols, or just the memories." He returned to seat himself opposite Sam. "She could go away, but it wouldn't help her. She's still looking for something. She expected it here, and it wasn't."

"I won't let her go away."

"You, Sam?" Ben's bushy brows arched over sleet-blue eyes. "Could you stop her?"

Crimson patches flecked Sam's cheeks. He thought, I've got to keep her here. She's so close, and I have so much to lose. Mollie is right—there must be something new for her to do; but it should be here, near me. He began slowly: "Mollie, remember on tour in the early days how she would go to the police and the papers, get the legal dope on crime? Fighting the devil, she called it. She liked that! The public ate it up. Remember, Moll? How about a—well, a crusade here? Something exciting, even dangerous, right here? Can't you see it: 'Angel strikes at sin'?"

"Careful," Ben interposed. "She doesn't know what sin is."

Sam was stunned. "My God, who knows better than Jenny Angel? That's her business!" He spun back to Mollie. "Look, I'll call Cory Benton at the *City Journal*. He's been decent. He'll have ideas. Something interesting."

Mollie agreed. "She'll like that."

"Yes, she'll like it," Ben said quietly, "but——" Sam cut

him off, reaching for the telephone, dialling distractedly, never guessing he was arranging his own destruction.

The two reporters, Cory Benton and Pete Haggerty from the *Journal's* crime staff, with Sam as added escort, convoyed Jenny through the first night's venture in vice investigation. By midnight they had invaded numerous bars, wined at checkered tables, scanned curtained shops and athletic clubs as well as once regal mansions, all to the accompaniment of Haggerty's graphic descriptions of crime. He was thoroughly relishing his part in the introduction of an Angel to life's seamier side:

"Black Joe was shot here. Never knew who did it. Over there, see that yellow house? Fancy girls can be had for a fair price. Real fancy—or so they tell me. And gambling anywhere along here. Rackets all over the place. Easy money. Easy go, too."

"And the police?"

"Oh, them! Every man has his price, you know, or his weakness. How about one more spot? The best. All the trimmings. The Black Diamond." Haggerty hadn't had so much fun since Black Joe's murder.

"Nothing but the best for Miss Angel." Cory Benton parked his car before the imposing black marble façade where shimmering lights proclaimed "The Black Diamond."

"Strictly class," Haggerty muttered, hurrying them in. "Strictly upper crust. More money turned over here in one night than in all the banks downtown. Gambling upstairs for privileged characters. You won't see it. Here it's a super-elegant night club. How do you like it?"

Jenny's frank admiration shone from her eyes, pinked her cheeks, blotting out ten years. "Beautiful."

They were seated in the centre of an enormous room, and the murmur of other guests drifted pleasantly to them. White-leathered chairs and tables paraded the black floor. One entire hall behind Jenny was glass-bricked with niches sporting ebony panthers and trumpeting elephants, each gleaming under its own light. Waiters circled soundlessly. The orchestra played a sensuous melody for the couples on the polished patch of floor. The skilful lighting subtly flattered the women, haloed the gardenia trees, accented the wall silhouettes. In opulence mixed with sophistication, the Black Diamond cloaked its sinister side under lovely glitter.

"Beautiful," Jenny repeated.

Sam ordered whisky. He needed it, for he had just realized with bitter certainty that Jenny, in her white gown with twinkling jewels in her black hair, belonged here. The shine, the smoothness framed her as surely as if it had been built for her, as surely as—he revolted from the truth—as surely as the Temple of Light. How, in God's name, could she belong here also? Crazy, Sam, crazy. Distantly he heard Haggerty rattling on:

"Rocky Patina owns this place. He is the really big boy, the top. Smoothest, smartest operator of them all. Merciless when crossed, they say, but he never does the dirty work himself. Elusive as the devil. Nobody can lay a hand on him. Absolutely square on outside deals; pays his bills, taxes; probably pays politicians and cops. Besides he's got something shady on most of them, so everybody's scared as hell of him. They respect him, though, even admire him. You don't see him around much. Don't think I've ever run into him more than a couple times myself. You ever seen Rocky, Benton?"

"Just pictures."

Rocky Patina. Jenny savoured the name on her tongue, thinking: Mine was Giannina Angelino. And what was yours, Rocky?

"I wouldn't mention him too much in your preaching," Benton continued anxiously. "Might mean serious trouble."

"If he's what you say, I doubt I'd frighten him. Sure, I'll mention him."

"He's—" Cory Benton stopped. "He's there, coming this way now."

Rocky Patina greeted them urbanely, impersonally while a waiter placed a chair beside Jenny's. Afterward she thought there should have been bells clanging or trumpets sounding. But she recalled only a waltz, a faint scent of gardenia and the tense faces of her three escorts.

Rocky himself was suavely casual. He had understood that she was coming, he explained; the Diamond was honoured. He was afraid, however, that she wouldn't find anything sensational here—just a legitimate night club. He spoke in a clipped, composed accent while his tan eyes narrowly surveyed and pigeonholed each of the three men. He ordered drinks all around on the house and then led Jenny, unprotesting, on to the dance floor.

"You are very lovely. Black and white and shining like my Diamond, ch?" He was scarcely taller than she, and his breath stirred her hair when he spoke.

"Thank you," she said. "And your Diamond is beautiful." She noticed that his mouth curled crookedly, that the smile was a mere mask and never mirrored in his eyes. Matching her rhythm to his, she leaned back slightly against the hand spread wide at the small of her back, possessive and disturbingly intimate. "I understand you are quite a power," she said.

"You must not believe all you hear." His light eyes lost their hardness searching hers, but his mouth was mocking. "People get excited. You should know that—in your business."

They danced in silence then, and she was conscious of many things, of furtive eyes watching them, of trained and tempered steel in his arms, of the cleanliness of his profile, and, most of all, of the instant response of her whole body to his touch.

When the music ended he returned her to her table and excused himself courteously.

All the way home the men seemed subdued, vaguely troubled. Even Haggerty seemed overcome. "Patina was right there. The boy himself!"

Jenny attempted small talk which bogged down because she was consciously trying to recall Rocky, his appearance, the sound of his voice, the throbbing he stirred in her breasts.

Finally Sam groaned, "I'm getting too old for these hours."

Under the street lamp Jenny saw that this was true, and she was briefly contrite that to her it mattered so very little now.

Undressing leisurely, she regaled Mollie with descriptions of the evening; but, even as she described the Black Diamond, some instinct made her keep Rocky secret inside her—Rocky Patina, strong, uncompromising, a man to reckon with, a man to match, a man for Jenny Angel.

Mollie was overjoyed. "We'll give it to them, won't we, Jen? The Angel on sin's tail!"

"We'll try, Moll." Jenny was smiling.

Chapter two

ROCKY PATINA sat hunched over his desk, kneading his brows with practiced finger tips. Before him a metal box, noncommittally tagged "Card Index," stood open beside a half-filled coffee cup and a heaping ashtray. He glanced at the white cards with their orderly notations on who was reliable, who was risky and why. On Tuesdays he regularly checked the file. He couldn't afford a single lapse, but at the moment the pain, barbed and familiar, was starting to erupt in his head, to grind down the left side until his eye twitched and his teeth ached. He despised the pain as relentlessly as he despised all weakness. He knew that he had risen to the top of his world and remained there, omnipotent and feared, because he had allowed himself no indulgences, no alcohol, no gambling, no women, no human weakness. He made capital of other men's frailties and follies; ruthlessly he stamped out his own. His self-discipline and his authority were common knowledge; but little else was known of him. True, the grapevine was laden with "facts": that he knew everything about everybody else and brooked no deviation from his commands; that the too ambitious disappeared mysteriously—good reason for anybody in his right mind

to stand back from tangling with him; on the other hand, that Rocky paid generously anybody who did his job and kept his mouth shut, and would protect him effectively both from brother hoodlums and from irate cops. In short, if you moved in Rocky's orbit you admired him, you hated him, and very probably you wouldn't know him if you met him.

Rocky planned it that way. On the street he assumed the camouflage of the average citizen and merged with the crowd. Fortyish, wiry, medium tall, he dressed conservatively in greys and blues, walked quietly or drove his three-year-old black Dodge. He might be an inconspicuous family man going to the office with a newspaper under his arm and a tired frown between his eyes.

Possibly Rocky's very intangible, elusive impersonality was what his people feared the most. They couldn't understand him and couldn't reach him—but he could both understand and reach them, disastrously if he chose. Best not fool with him. Thus Rocky Patina travelled alone, and planned to continue that way, uniquely supreme in his own netherworld. He had been a long hard time getting there.

Twenty years ago in Chicago he had been a nonentity named Rockwell Patton, starving himself to get through the university. Nurtured in a seedy back street by a whining, domineering mother and a dreary, downtrodden father, he grew up surly and resentful. When his parents died of the 'flu within a week of each other, he was left completely alone and glad of it. Unloved and unloving, his sole goal was to amass money. Talk in his home had always centred on money; the miserable lack of it, the limitless power of it, the everlasting necessity of it. He had aimed to be a lawyer, but one night in a bowling

alley, he had been hired for a private job, highjacking a truck of smuggled whisky. He was paid off with a wad of crisp bills, which he sped back to his room to count. After that he refused to waste time in school. Within the year he was bossing his own gang, smuggling top-grade Canadian liquors across the border, charging fantastic prices but delivering genuine goods. Business prospered, and his bank account fattened. With the demise of prohibition he headed for the coast to re-establish himself. Now he had a legendary name, a staggering bank balance, and a record officially unblemished. So he had arrived. Where and why, he couldn't have stated himself. He had never thought happiness or well-being important. His personal wants were few; his habits, ascetic; his hobbies, limited to the theatre, a few books and whimsical anonymous donations to charity. Anonymous because he abhorred gratitude as he did other emotions. Because friendship was, obviously, a softness and a snare, he allowed himself no companionship save for his bodyguard-chauffeur-valet-secretary, a man selected for his absolute loyalty and usually dispatched without trace within two years—a fact which caused much speculation on the grapevine but in no way interfered with his acquiring a replacement. The latest, Chips Magoon, had miraculously survived three years already. Big, beefy, but quick on his feet, with a peculiar talent for remembering faces, give-away mannerisms, and personal histories, Chips had an unquestioning, unquestionable loyalty to his near-god and hero. Daily he guarded the inner sanctum. No one saw Rocky without Magoon's say-so. Mornings like this when Rocky was studying the card file and nursing a headache nothing short of calamity could budge Chips.

However, when Dandy Acaro appeared bearing news

that an ambitious queer was promoting a deal with the Chicago crowd, Chips saw calamity and sent him inside. In fifteen minutes Dandy emerged thumbing a fattered wallet but looking scared. Chips sighed. Somebody would be leaving the West for good to-night.

Rocky was pale when Chips answered his buzz. He hated this sort of thing, this ruthless exhibition, these remorseless tactics, but he hated even more the something soft that made him, however privately, resist ruthlessness and remorselessness. The pain was knife-sharp in his left eye.

He snapped: "My head's killing me. Dandy was here. You'll arrange the details." He handed over a notched card.

"Yeah."

"To-night."

"Sure."

"Pay well."

Chips didn't reply. Paying well was obvious. "Where'll we be, boss?"

"I don't know." Rocky covered his twitching eye. He had to think, but the ache had tripled since Dandy's visit. "Where?" When anything happened to one of his men, he had to appear in public at that particular time so that anyone interested would know his incontestable alibi.

"So where, boss? No fights. We seen the lousy play."

Unexpectedly Rocky laughed. Chips gasped. "You O.K.?"

Rocky poured three aspirins into his palm and swallowed them with the residue of his cold coffee. "Remember last week? That woman that came here with the newsmen, hunting crime?"

"Yeah. You danced with her. Gorgeous dame." Chips

licked his thick lips appreciatively. "Jenny something."

"Angel. She's an evangelist."

"A what?"

"Never mind. She puts on a public performance. Very public. Everybody would know we were there, Chips. It would be sensational. We'll go to the Temple of Light." He was almost laughing again, but his eyes were bleary with aching.

Chips bellowed. "Goddamn me, boss. That's a smart one!"

"Every paper in the country will know where we are. All right, Chips, get on with your business." Rocky reached for his card file and was scowling again, his thin lips compressed, when Chips left.

On the first night of the "crusade against crime" Jenny launched her attack against sin with gambling as her focus. The second night she was colourfully graphic. On the third she spoke with the torrid tongue of an avenging angel. Everyone in her audience was pleasurable shocked and satisfactorily righteous. Mollie and Sam were led to hope that Jenny might settle down into a long, exciting, possibly useful crusade. Only Ben Hayes detected false notes. On the one hand, he thought, Jenny was almost too happy, too excited. And on the other she wasn't fighting the enemy at all; she was missing the core of crime, for she was not mentioning Rocky Patina. Why was he not to be included? The fringes were only symptomatic of the centre. A prophetess, he pointed out patiently, did not condemn half an evil. He knew better than to believe Jenny was afraid, and so he asked her about Patina.

The next night Jenny shifted her ground entirely, deliberately directing the limelight off gambling and

therefore off Rocky. Even Ben was taken in by her assaults on prostitution: "You mothers, daughters, wives, save womanhood. Don't let your men be slaves to sex. Shut down the houses that rob you and your children of their rights. Blast out the red lights."

For first-hand material Jenny descended upon the yellow house Haggerty had pointed out, and asked the stern and primly proper Madam for a job. Madam was not naïve: she dispatched Jenny nearly as ignorant as she had come. But the visit made a fine story with which Jenny, virtuously and vengefully, raised the roof of the temple that night and other nights until the police, knowing they were outwitted, ruefully granted concessions. Temporarily they closed a house or two, even picked up a few vagrants and a couple of independent bookies, and thereupon nobly reported the city's improved morals. The citizens hailed Jenny handsomely. Still no one mentioned Rocky Patina, not until he came.

Jenny was robed and ready that night when a frenzied usher brought his news. Rocky Patina was up there in the balcony. "Honest to God, Miss Angel! I put him there myself. Look, you can see from here." He pointed out Rocky and Chips, isolated in an island of prudently vacated seats.

The congregation was awash with rumours. Patina, the gang leader, Patina, the man who bore the marks of Satan himself, sat in the Temple of Light!

To Jenny also the excitement was almost unbearable, not because the devil walked in Eden, but because the man, Rocky, had come. For whatever reason, he had come at last. Rudy's trumpet called. Like liquid music she moved on stage, so radiant, so eloquent that the audience nearly neglected to observe Patina's reactions.

Chips grunted, "Jee-zus, what a dame!" Rocky leaned forward. Jenny was a woman, and so he had obliterated any memory of her; but her impact on him now was incredible. Here, he thought, was a human being such as he had never seen before, with unleashed power in her body, unlit dynamite in her hands and eyes. She spoke of destroying evil and starting anew, but he didn't listen. He only looked and felt and recognized in wonderful terror that here was a woman to match him.

Chips, witnessing Rocky's shameless capitulation, was frankly scandalized. "Listen, boss, they know we're here. Let's beat it. Stuff like that gives me the creeps." Rocky's tan eyes had darkened. His body was inflexible in concentration. "Boss, please, dames—" Rocky shook off Chips as he would a bothersome fly, hardly noticing. Jenny paused and looked up at him, and Rocky knew, absolutely and shockingly, that he must have her.

He heard the call to sinners, impelling yet sweetly promising. She looked squarely at him again. "Come to Jesus. Come to me." He thought, I'm coming—later and alone.

"Boss," Chips was pleading, "for Cripe's sake, let's go!"
"Not now. You wait in the car."

"But you said, 'No women.' You always said, 'No women.' They're bad."

"Wait in the car."

- Wretchedly, Chips fled before the firm, cold command.

Jenny dismissed them all. Alone she waited in her study, her flowing white robe knotted at the waist and swept back from her bare arms, a Scarlet Angel rose revolving in her restless hands. He must come. Rocky, please come. Turbulently her mind begged as though she could will him to her.

At last he was standing there, vibrant and taut as a pulled bowstring, against her peaceful green walls, the door locked behind him.

"I hoped you would come," she said.

"I had to."

"Why?"

"Something," he strolled toward her, "something—I had a reason for being in the public to-night. It doesn't matter. I saw you. I wanted to see you more. Alone. Now. Do you understand?" The tan eyes were golden in their intensity.

"Won't you sit down?" she asked. "I could make coffee. I have a hot plate in there." Banal remarks wasting precious time, she thought. Oh, Rocky, Rocky, what is it makes me want to cry and to laugh? It's like nothing I've ever known. Like something I've always wanted.

"No coffee," he said. He sat down on the couch "Come and sit by me."

She went, sitting close, her knees brushing his. She was quivering.

"What are you afraid of?"

"Nothing." She was confused; she was overwhelmed; but she was not afraid.

He slid his arm about her. He had never caressed a woman like this before, soft, strong, intoxicatingly lovely. He forgot weakness and kissed her suddenly and fiercely.

Jenny yielded herself naturally and freely with no qualms, no misgivings. Had she not dreamed of this since she met him? Now the days of her seeking and never finding were passed. Love was here, and passion. Love played to trumpets.

Once he asked, his lips in her hair: "You know who I am?"

"Yes." But she had nothing to do with that Patina. Here was the man she had waited for all her life, the only man, no more, no less.

"And who you are—Angel?"

"So they say."

"This is crazy. We are destroying ourselves, both of us."

His lips were tracing her eyebrows.

"Perhaps." Imploringly her arms encircled him again.

At midnight the temple stood solid and serene, uncaring that humans wept and loved on a rose-coloured couch within its tranquil walls. Outside, Chips slept fitfully against the steering wheel. Up in a tower room an old man rocked endlessly in his wooden chair, bothered in spirit though he could not think why.

They agreed to utmost caution. No letters, no gifts, no souvenirs to betray them. Chips alone knew how or where they met. For weeks they were blind enough and selfish enough in love to believe they might succeed. They were not children; they had few illusions, but the now was miracle enough. They were a match for each other, equally impassioned and wilful, yet newly tender. Each had been essentially empty so long, each so lonely in a position of power, each so starved physically and emotionally for what the other had, that when they came together their union was heedless and headlong.

In Jenny, the sorcery which was her stock in trade was intensified and heightened. All her expansive love for nameless thousands merged a moment into the one towering infatuation which she could not conceal. Everything she did or said reflected her inner rapture. To her people she was, therefore, even more alluring, more intimate, more compelling. Each one wished to learn for himself what untried God-begotten treasure had been revealed to

her. Her excitement was contagious. Catch it, then, catch the tail of the rising comet!

Jenny, suspecting that her happiness with Rocky shone through her services, was doubly careful in the daytime, but never to the point of denial. Constant risk, she and Rocky admitted together. Eventual catastrophe they almost conceded. But denial of themselves they never once considered. The very conspicuousness of Jenny's car and her habit of driving off at odd hours were useful now. Because it was axiomatic that where the blue Cadillac was, there was Jenny, she would park in public places, the main streets, a favourite inn, a thronged bathing beach. Then, in a simple suit, a screening headscarf and without a rose, Jenny would board streetcar or bus to descend casually at some popular stop where Rocky would be waiting. It was so easy! And every day that she went seemed better than the last.

She wanted to know Rocky, the inner, real man, not the one the police eyed and the big-time gangsters envied. For her that Patina was far more rumour than reality. But she learned much about the Rocky she loved, because he told her.

For the first time in his life Rocky found relief in talking out his early wounds, his stricken childhood, tormenting ambition, and self-discipline. He even mentioned Chips Magoon and the Black Diamond with affection. But about the rest he was starkly silent. And she never pried.

Once when they were lying together on a wharf in a deserted lake, Rocky remarked: "It must be strange to be loved so much by so many. Jenny, you are the only person who ever loved me."

Raising herself on one elbow, her skin bronzed and sparkling, she grinned down at him. "I think I'm the only

one who ever knew you, darling. Besides, do you want others?"

"You're all I could handle. But you know people are afraid of me, and, because they're afraid, they hate. I wanted it that way, only . . . Well, you—everyone loves you everywhere."

She wriggled pleasurable in the satisfaction of being loved. "M-m-m, but quality's better than quantity." Then she remembered a young boy's face and dropped back to hide her check against Rocky for comfort. "There is one who hates me, I think. My son."

"I don't believe it. Nobody could hate you, Jenny."

Annoyed by Jerry's chill intrusion, she sat up swiftly. "Come on in the lake, Rocky. Let's swim."

"Nope. Too comfortable." The worn planks were warm against his bare back. He stretched luxuriously, his firm muscles rippling smoothly under her hand.

She chided him: "Lazy, come on."

He kissed her hand. "Come," he mimicked, "come to me. Oh, sinner, come!"

She slapped him playfully. "I will not be mocked, my friend. Besides, I do come to you, don't I?" She hesitated, then inquired unexpectedly: "Rocky, why do you come? To the temple, I mean."

"To see you."

"No." He did come, once a week, always unannounced, always disappearing with the crowd. Even without seeing him, she knew the nights when he was there. She knew by the titillated curiosity of the congregation, by the sensitive chemistry of her body. "Why, Rocky?"

"Because I can't believe it," he told her after a while. "You are magnificent up there. You are magnificent down here. But you are not—not quite the same."

"That's easy. Up there I'm what they want. Down here I'm what you want."

"No, sweet, you're only what you make yourself. You've been the Scarlet Angel a long time. You love those people too, my rivals. That's what frightens me."

"Frightens you? Shame! Nobody frightens you, not even me. As for the Scarlet Angel I wouldn't have kept at it more than a dozen years if I didn't like it. But in addition and quite obviously, I love you. You know it."

But she couldn't withstand the stabbing doubt of his steady gaze. She lay back beside him and closed her eyes. And what about you, she wanted to ask him, and your private life? No, never ask questions. You don't want the answers. Now was the fulfilment of old longing. Now was love. Don't ask questions. Don't remember anything. Love is never to be repented, never to be mourned. Not even love illicit by all moral codes and guilty in the sight of God. But, Jenny thought, God is love. God is beauty. God is mercy. And if God be these things—Mollic, Ben, Sam, everybody—if God be these things, why, He must understand me now. God, maybe, but not the rest of you. She quailed. "Rocky! Love me, Rocky!"

"Hush, Jenny! Of course." The strong brown hands slipped under her, lifting, turning, knowing the right ways to make the two become one and thus wipe out both yesterday and to-morrow.

Chapter three

FOR weeks Mollie remained content with Jenny's change of mood. Plainly she was enjoying the "holy war" on crime; but when that passed and her exuberance increased Mollie began to wonder why. Now then, could it possibly be because of Sam? No, it wasn't Sam. Too often she met him solitary and forlorn and, come to think of it, very rarely with Jenny. Once when she dared ask what he thought about the change in Jenny, he replied tartly that he hadn't noticed any change. The Temple of Light was booming. Jenny was busy. Everything was fine, wasn't it? The agony in his eyes belied his words. Mollie retreated hastily to mull over her problem privately. Finally, she consulted old Ben Hayes, for whom she had developed a healthy respect, partly because Jenny trusted and confided in him, partly because she had a "funny feeling" about him being in with the Lord, but mostly because she surmised that he knew Jenny better than either she or Sam.

"Nice place you got here. Nice view," she observed pleasantly.

"Yes. I like it."

"Well, what I come up here for," Mollie jumped in.
"What do you think's got into Jenny?"

Ben wasn't prepared for her directness. He inspected the back of the book open across his knee. "The temple goes well. The room here is used." He nodded toward his two telephones.

"Oh, everything's flourishing all right. Even that gangster fellow—Rocky what's-his-name—even he shows up. What a conversion that would make!" Her beady eyes snapped gleefully.

"I suppose it would," Ben agreed mildly.

"Sure. But Jenny now. All spring there's this change. Remember when she was so moody we got worried and all? Now she's—like a balloon, floating off up in the air, I feel I ought to pull the string and get her down."

"Not a balloon," Ben commented gravely. "Too earthly for that."

"Right!" Mollie clapped her hands. "That's why I figure the Lord's not in it. Something—something . . ." She frowned over the exact word. "Physical," she concluded. "Hot and physical." She blushed to say to him what she hadn't admitted to herself. "What is it? Why?"

Ben's vision blurred on his book. How could an old man tell what his eyes fathomed in the night, or what he guessed in his heart? How could he betray her who was supposed to be the Lord's own—especially if he only guessed? If he didn't know, didn't want to know? "Why don't you ask her?"

"Outright?" Mollie was flabbergasted. "I mean the Angel—she won't talk if she doesn't want to."

"Ask her. Maybe she wants to talk."

"I will if you say so."

Mollie was sceptical, but one night she asked point-blank: "What's got into you lately?"

Jenny in a sheer golden gown reclined gracefully across her bed, her arms folded under her head, her whole being wide awake and smiling. Mollie, hugging her besflowered robe about her, lounged on the bed's edge and tinkled the ice in her glass of tea.

"What's up, Jenny?"

Instinctively Jenny knew she should toss Mollie a flip-pant, even lying answer; but the hours with Rocky had been wonderful that afternoon, and she wanted, loverlike, to talk about him. Why not to Mollie? She was her friend, loyal, trustworthy. Recklessly she answered: "I'm glad you asked, Moll. I've wanted to tell you. Only it's so difficult to explain. People won't understand. I——"

"It's a man." Mollie stated flatly.

"Does it show so much?"

"Who?"

Jenny wanted to retreat now, not to confess at all, to keep Rocky's name safe.

"Who, Jen?"

Shutting her eyes, clinging to the day's beauty and happiness, Jenny took her chance. "Rocky Patina."

All the evil and the fear that the name inspired revealed itself in Mollie's convulsed face. "No! No! No!"

"But, Moll, I love him. He's not like what you think."

"No. Not that one. He's rotten and wicked. Wicked."

Mollie shrieked hysterically.

"But not to me. That's what matters. To me he's——"

While Jenny talked of Rocky in lover's terms, unadulterated rage shook Mollie. Her Angel sinning with the chief son of Satan and loving it. Mad, scarlet sinner,

Jenny Angel. She rose, ludicrous yet terrible in her wrath.
“Stop that crazy talk.”

Jenny sat up, clutching at Mollie’s robe. “Listen,” she pleaded. “I wanted you to know. I love him, do you hear? It’s like finding a part of myself that’s been missing, like——”

“What about the temple and God? Patina!” Mollie spat the name. Her features were contorted by the sight of the end of the world coming. “Oh, Jenny, how could you?”

Jenny’s hands fell limp in her lap, and the first fear festered in her. “Moll, look, this is me, Jenny. You took me in off the streets. Remember? Then you were kind. Be kind now,” she begged—for if Mollie deserted her what would the others do? “Am I no longer human?”

“You’re the Scarlet Angel,” Mollie said despairingly as though trying to invoke a saint long gone. Her eyes never left Jenny: the same well-loved face now suddenly torn with grief. And Mollie knew that for the first time she had caused that grief. Over and over she thought, I’ll love her again, no matter what, but not now, not yet. She had to know everything, all the shattering truth. “You slept with him?”

Now, Jenny asked herself, where was the beauty, the pine scent and the star sheen and the hands at her breasts, and afterward the exquisite pain? Hold it safe inside the heart, incorruptible. Mollie stared her down. Jenny said, “You know I never do anything halfway.”

“So——” Like a keening cry over the dead.

“Then I’m the fallen angel?”

Mollie squeezed the doorknob. She had to leave at once before tears dissolved the anger.

“Pray for me, Moll, the way you used to?”

“No. No more.” With a hateful push she closed the door behind her.

Jenny put out all the lights and found temporary haven in the dark, calling for Rocky. Over Sam's radio a trumpet, solitary and sad above the strings, played the lonesome blues.

Mollie—whether because she loved Jenny or because she loved the temple—never told what she knew. In Jenny's presence she was sober; elsewhere she kept very busy. All summer she witnessed the Scarlet Angel's success, grumbled at tourists and pilgrims trampling the temple grounds, and heard Rudy's trumpet sound at regular intervals. To the outsider all was well. To Jenny, because of Mollie, the unseen change was real and disturbing, a storm brewing, not yet broken. Sam was morose. Even Ben was withdrawn. Or maybe she herself was withdrawn, knowing that she no longer belonged to them, knowing that in the secret hours she belonged entirely to Rocky, while in the public temple hours she belonged to her people, loving them also, forgiving their sins without wincing, without irony and without self-application.

For Sam the summer was impossible. Drugged by apathy, he yielded more and more authority to Peterson and vainly pursued solace at the beach. But there could be no solace without Jenny. Somewhere in the maze of last year he had lost her, and he didn't know how or where or why. They never mentioned the good building years now, nor the temple, nor hopes. They never mentioned anything. Something or someone loomed between them so wide, so tall they couldn't see each other. But who? He never saw her with any man, and yet he knew Jenny well enough to know it must be a man. So where did she go afternoons? With whom? He had to find out. On the first

day he trailed the blue Cadillac he could not bring himself to follow all the way, but on the third day he stayed with the bus until Jenny descended and went straight to the man in the black parked car. Rocky Patina! Sam was ill with the green-sickness and nearly out of his mind. Jealousy ripped him to pieces.

He burst in on Mollie, his face livid. "Patina. God, Moll, tell me it isn't true."

Mollie put her mending down and looked at him. Sam read the fact in her greyness, in her warped and working mouth.

"Patina! That devil. She couldn't! By God, I'll kill him." Sam was gone.

He returned at two in the morning. Only the tower lights streaked through the Venetian blinds in the hall, and he stumbled at his door. Mollie was dressed and waiting. With pity she put him to bed. With compassion she covered his reeking form. Under her ministrations he muttered drunkenly, "Jen, Jen, Jenny?" Then he lapsed into a dazed and snoring slumber. Leaving, Mollie stopped at his desk, pawed through old mail until she found a year-old letter from Chicago. She carried it to her own room, and wrote in an awkward, third-grade hand: "Dear Mrs. Wilcox. Sam's having a bad time. Maybe he'll be in Chicago soon. I want you to know he is a good man." She chewed her pencil, underlined the word "good," and signed her name. "P.S. I been with him and Jenny Angel all the time, so I know. Sam's good."

Overnight Sam Wilcox was a broken man, vengeful and angry in his soul, sick at the whole world. Jenny saw and supplied her own reason and locked herself in her study. The first fear, begun by Mollie, swelled and hardened until real pain bit into her. Mollie knew. Sam knew. Who next?

Ben? The papers? Her people? How long before the unfeeling world would smack its lips over her sins, pleasantly diverted that one so high could fall so far? Rocky, she thought. We're losing, Rocky. She repeated his name aloud, and her breathing cased a fraction. Whatever happened, she had him. And in the togetherness they would be complete, wouldn't they? She had taught him happiness. He had taught her fulfilment. Trying to blot out Sam, she dwelt on Rocky—love casting out fear. He liked—let's see—Rocky liked silk shirts on hot nights, chain-smoking, rare steaks, fantastically striped shorts. She laughed, remembering his embarrassment when she discovered this. He liked tangoes and black coffee and making love to her. Above all else, that. And, for that, the end was coming soon. The trumpets would be silenced. Don't let it happen, Rocky! She had a little time still. In it she wondered how Sam had found out. By telephone she traced Mollie to the clothing rooms.

"I saw Sam. He knows. How?"

Over the wire came the prattle of bustling women. "He followed you," Mollie said, and hung up.

She had not expected that. Good, kind, decent Sam, stooping to a contemptible trick like following her. And yet, was his action as contemptible as what he found? What could he call me now? Whore, tramp, sinner: the words are true, aren't they? Yes. No. Rocky, help me say it's not like that.

A knock on the door froze her.

"It's Ben, Jenny."

Oh. She had forgotten books. What good were they and their paper philosophies and their moralizings now? She trained her voice to steadiness. "Ben, I'm sorry. Not now. Come to-morrow."

Hearing his footsteps fade, she thought, Ben will be the next. Perhaps he knew already, knowing so much about her anyway, reading her very soul as handily as he read his Testament. Unbending as a steel rod, he would judge her. Uncompromising as the law and the prophets from whom he came, merciless in the name of the Lord, he would judge her. She cringed, recalling ancient steel-blue eyes that, burning, would rust her love and tarnish all its gold. "Good heavens!" she exclaimed out loud as if hearing could make believing more real. "Ben's just an old man who wouldn't hurt me if he could. Why, he owes me everything." But she couldn't listen in her heart because from that first night she had known, unreasonably and uncannily yet absolutely, that Ben had been sent to her for a special purpose. To instruct her, she had supposed, to aid her preaching and to do the praying. Maybe not, maybe he had come to judge and to pronounce punishment. Rocky, save us!

She was in a cold sweat, and sore all over. She forced herself to wash her face and arms, to take two Wilcox headache powders. She thought dully that she had to plan to-night's service. Her lips curled spitefully. All right! What would the Scarlet Angel say to this—to Jenny Angel, for instance? Behind closed lids she visualized them both: the Scarlet Angel, wearing white and roses and radiance like a halo; and Jenny, just herself in a sleeveless blue cotton. The two were identical, yet unlike; the pale blue kneeling to the radiant white. For what? Forgiveness, naturally, especially forgiveness for the lost sheep over whom, it was said, there was considerable rejoicing in high places. Forgiveness, and let him that is without sin among you cast the first stone—yes!

Jenny Angel sat erect. She would preach forgiveness

Friday night, Sunday night, and next week and on, finding different ways to teach mercy, to plead love for the wretched until everyone who heard would believe that forgiveness was the chief of virtues, and the greater the sin, the greater the grace of their mercy. God help them—and her—if they forgot their preparation when she needed them! She reached for pen and paper. To-night the Scarlet Angel would begin her fight for Jenny. Why not? They could not be divided. It never occurred to her then or later to call for penitence on the sinner's part. After all, she and Rocky could not be divided either.

In the beginning Rocky had not believed that love could last. By the time he knew the truth, he knew also that Jenny and the rest of his life could not be woven together. The knowledge began slowly to tear him apart. Every morning and night he appeared at the Black Diamond. To the hundreds in his power the tear was hidden. He was as smart, as cool, as aloof as ever. The lesser boys dutifully delivered up his percentage on any take. The dice rolled; the wheels spun; the Diamond profited. No police were too inquisitive, and Dandy Acaro couldn't raise a cent because of wandering loyalties. In short, everything was rosy. Only Chips Magoon knew it was time to be scared.

Repeatedly he quoted: “ ‘No women. They thrive on men.’ ”

“Jenny’s different. She’s as big-time in her way as we are.”

Chips snorted. “That’s worse.”

“I’m human. I discovered it a little late; but I’m human, and I love her.”

“You got no right to be human.”

Rocky laughed outright and patted Chips’s shoulder.

"Take it easy. We'll live." He left his apartment whistling.

Watching as his tin god disappeared, Chips tried wearily to figure some way to save him. Only it wasn't much use. That witch, that Angel. It was a bad day when Rocky went to her.

Chips wandered over to the Diamond. At the bar the boys gave him a grilling. How come this craziness, the boss showing up at that screwy dame's place like the paper says? Chips was defensive. "Crazy like a fox." What is it, some new racket? Throwing the police off something we don't know? "The boss got brains," Chips reminded them. "The boss makes money, and he's got ideas." They believed him. But for how long? He kept asking himself. How long until some bright boy sees the weakness and moves in? One flaw, brother, one gimmick gone flooey, and the whole set-up would crash.

Then Rocky took to pacing at night, while Chips in his small bedroom listened and asked why, and was panic-stricken waiting for the spark to hit the powder.

All summer, during the happy hours with Jenny and the meaningless hours without her, Rocky had been trying to find a way out. Weighing, testing, discarding hope after hope. All he knew was that he could not lose her now. She had taught him to laugh sometimes, to love, especially to love her, the softness, the suppleness, the ardent response, Jenny Angel. As the weeks passed, his dependence upon her increased. Part time was not enough. He wanted her all the time. His want made him walk the floor at night, wondering if she would come to be his alone. Each time that he convinced himself she would, he attended the temple and beheld the Scarlet Angel, divine before the six thousand rivals whom he could not buy off nor eliminate in the dark nor even fight openly. When he was

there, he knew the Scarlet Angel was not his, and he suffered tortures until he held Jenny in his arms again. He had to find a way to take her with him. Jenny, Jenny, come away with me!

Rocky sat down again at his desk and pressed his palms against his throbbing temple. Damn the headaches. Damn the weaknesses. Damn. Outside in the alley, the sanitation department was noisily removing the refuse of the Black Diamond. Men shouted to each other and banged the cans. Rocky slammed down the window and tried to think, cloudily at first, then clearly, then intently, an idea fomenting with the rising beat in his head. He would buy a fancy hotel in Mexico where he could build another Black Diamond, outfit it around Jenny, make it beautiful like her, storm-black and sparkling white. He'd have a legitimate night club for tourists, and Jenny for his wife. Holy mother of God, after all these years. Rocky Patina would be an honest family man. Well, he could afford it. The pain sharpened; he gritted his teeth and rang for Chips.

Without preliminaries he announced: "I'm pulling out." "Of what?" Chips was baffled.

"Out of here. The whole place. Everything."

Chips staggered, then mustered his senses. "You can't," he said patiently. "You know too much about too many. They'd kill you, boss. Nobody in deep like you pulls out. You know that."

"I'm smarter than they are," Rocky retorted. "They wouldn't know until I'm gone. Burn the files, keep them, whatever you want. I don't care."

"Boss you can't. It ain't that easy. Walls got ears. A heap of tough boys just waiting to get you anyhow. They'll kill you. That's all."

Through his pain Rocky squinted at Chips. "You can have the Diamond."

For a split second, Chips was tempted; but fear was bigger than greed. "I don't want it. Boss, listen, please. Stay here. You're doing fine. Nobody knows about you and the dame. That's—"

Rocky stood up. A vein in his left temple pounded visibly. "Stop your blubbering, fool. No one knows about this unless you tell them. And you know what would happen to you." His speech cracked at Chips like a bull whip. The old Rocky, commanding, certain, glared. "I know what I am doing. Now get out, and keep your damn mouth shut."

In the outer office Chips sat numbly for hours until it was dark and he decided that Rocky must have gone out the back way. Despondently he returned to the apartment. In the next days they didn't talk much. Rocky was away a lot, and Chips took to hanging around a local bar; it seemed safer than the Black Diamond. One night he roamed the town till one o'clock, and then returned home to find a jubilant Rocky waiting for him, a total stranger now with flashing golden eyes and laughter deep inside.

"It's all set, Chips. I'm out. It's O.K. Nobody killed. I'll admit I was worried though. The Mexican deal is all clear. I've sold the Diamond and bought tickets out of the country. I'm seeing Jenny to-night. She doesn't know yet, but she'll come. I know it. It's going to be good, Chips. For the first time in my life, it's going to be good."

"Fine, boss," Chips said dully. "But be careful. You ain't gone yet. Somebody gets wind, and it's still the end for you. Easy, boss."

"Right. Here, Chips," Rocky thrust a wad of bills at him. "Go have a big time on me. There's more later, and

if you ever want a job, look for the Black Diamond in Mexico, west coast. So long, Chips,"

Over and over Chips consoled himself. The boss was smart. Maybe he could pull this deal. But only maybe. He hunted down Dandy Acaro. No harm checking a little. Anything that was brewing, Dandy'd know and talk for a price. Chips had the price. Over the cards he overtly waved his bills. Dandy's greedy little eyes popped enthusiastically.

"Boss gave me this. O.K., eh?"

"Yeah. You want to know something?" Dandy's nostrils quivered.

"What?" Chips dealt the cards slowly.

"Some of the boys been gabbing last couple of days. Seems they got wind some place the Rock's pulling out. I tell them they're bats. Rocky wouldn't do that. Some dame, they say. I don't know. Crazy, huh?"

"Sure, crazy."

Dandy leered over his fanned-out cards. "Guy could get killed doing that. Any time. To-night maybe."

Chips put the bills down. "I gotta go, boy, just remembered something. Be back."

Wedging the moncy into his pocket Dandy snickered. Crazy rumour. The boss would have somebody's head off to-morrow. The boss would never pull out. Not the Rock. He had it too good.

Chapter four

JENNY had no difficulty avoiding Sam, for he was in no mood to see her either. She was aware that in an exorable if businesslike way he was training others to his dutics at the temple. He would not harm the temple itself. Whatever he might wish for her, even Sam realized that the Temple of Light was an independent entity, satisfying a dozen human hungers. Quite possibly it didn't need either of them any more; but Jenny couldn't recognize that. The temple might function without Sam, but not without her, its heart and soul. Doggedly she pursued her work as if nothing had happened or was going to happen; but all the while she was expecting her tightrope to snap, her cliff to cave in, the end.

One morning old Ben inquired: "What's wrong? There's a terrible sadness here; but Sam won't tell me, nor Mollie. Will you?"

So Ben didn't know! Her relief was immense. "Not yet. No."

His steel-bright inspection blistered the back of her neck, but she refused to look up from her book. "Here Luther says . . ." Stubbornly she erected a barrier of impersonal quoting between them. Ben became the tutor, she the

pupil. Thus she preserved two hours each day, wiped clean of pain and Sam, of pleasure and Rocky. She lived this time with Ben objectively in the atmosphere of the ages. During the rest of the day and the night her nerves stung and smarted waiting for Sam to strike, to hurt her as she had hurt him, and then finally, she hoped, to go away. Why else did he linger, boorish and menacing, scrutinizing her darkly. Sam unnerved her, she complained.

"And well he might," Mollie told her crabbedly. "You sure blasted him to smithereens."

"But, Moll, what will he do?"

"Who knows? I don't know much nowadays myself. You took the gimp out of me, too."

"Why don't you punish me then? Why don't you tell everybody? Go on and ruin me, and be happy!"

"The Lord says vengeance is His. He'll take care of you in His time."

"Mollie, why don't you make me stop seeing Rocky? That's what you want, isn't it?"

"Could I? Could anybody?"

After a while Jenny admitted: "No, I have to see Rocky." Nobody could keep them apart. In fact these acid days she clung closer to Rocky, balancing her fear with her love so that by night she had the courage to become the Scarlet Angel, imbuing dim lives with tinsel and savour.

Three out of five nights the Angel pleaded the case of Jenny, extolling mercy and forgiveness. No one seemed to mind. Who did not crave mercy? Who did not bear guilt for a dozen infringements of moral or legal law? What could be more rewarding than to be redeemed by those consecrated hands, cherished by those lustrous, pitying

eyes? Why, for that alone sinning was worth while. Unerringly Jenny persisted, praying only to any gods there might be that no one would drop that last straw. So much she could manage. No more. But the straw materialized: its name was Jerry.

Jenny nearly succumbed to hysterics then, thinking of Sam and how to explain him, fretful, moribund; thinking of Rocky and how to escape detection by her boy's eyes to meet him. Without Rocky how could she endure the days and the nights? Above all, how could she, on the brink of inner dissolution, abide the inevitable rebuff at her son's hands? She had suggested to Jerry that this year he need not come West between camp and school. However, there in his correct, blue-black writing was the statement: "I have something to tell you. I must come." He was on his way.

Battling with tears, she had told Rocky that she could not see him for three days.

Cheerfully he had responded: "O.K., Angel. I'm pretty busy myself right now."

"No. Don't say that," she begged tremulously. "Say you'll miss me; say you'll be lonesome too."

Rocky cupped her chin and tilted her face. "Easy, darling. You're all to pieces."

"I know. I'm sorry."

"Listen, Jenny, everything is going to be all right for us. I promise you. The next time I see you I'll have a surprise. It will be all right." His hand stroked her cheek. "Believe me."

She shook her head slightly. She didn't believe anything just now, either for good or for bad. She was just hanging on, and she must have Rocky to hang on to. His arms embraced her, snug and shielding; she let herself rest in them

one delicious moment before she loosed herself and ran to catch her bus.

In the following days she concentrated on Jerry, determined to act the mother pattern as far as feasible. She tried to anticipate every contingency. In the end she was prepared for everything except Jerry himself, who this time unexpectedly behaved with charity. He was courteous, tolerant; at mealtime he recounted school and camp events; in the evening he self-consciously distributed souvenirs of his ranch summer, forgetting no one, not even Ben. Examining her hand-tooled belt, Jenny thought that perhaps he had grown up, this wise and considerate strange-son of hers; perhaps he would develop humanity or perhaps he had practical reasons for being nice. She bided her time.

On the third morning he joined her in her study. Supported by the tranquillity of her favourite room, by the knowledge of his agreeableness, Jenny was almost benign, even a shade maternal. She gave him a cordial smile when he entered, and before he could stop himself he said, "Hello, Mother."

Startled by the word, they stared at each other, black eyes penetrating black. "Sit down, son."

He slumped into the white leather armchair by her desk. Chattering people passed in the corridor. Grass cutters whined across the lawn. He looked at his mother, in lime-green with a scarlet rose on the collar, dignified behind her papers, and he waited. She was waiting too. An unwanted memory pinched him, the memory of how excessively he had loved her when he was small, before he had learned to scorn her for flamboyance, to hate her for neglect. Flushing, he picked at a loose button on his blazer.

"You came for a special reason, Jerry," she prompted him. In her voice echoed the magic warmth and intimacy that lured thousands.

Jerry heard it and stoically reminded himself that he owed her nothing personally. His spine stiffened; his feet planked down square before him; his hands balled into fists. He said: "I saw my father."

"Your—father?"

"Yes. He wrote me. He wanted to see me. Months back. One of my cousins just entered first form, and he told my father about me. That's how he knew I was there."

Jenny felt the boy's voice spilling out, cracking now and then, but tenaciously ejecting everything he intended to say. "He asked me to come to Boston to meet him. I went."

"How—how was he?" A dreary image of Ken, bitter and hateful, swam before her.

"Fine. Oh, he's pretty homely all right, but he has nice clothes. He took me home to Beacon Hill. I had his old room, way upstairs. It's a nice house, and everybody was good to me. Grandma Wyatt—well, she's kind of frigid, but Father says she always was and not to worry. He says she's nicer to me already than she ever was to him."

"You liked it there?"

"Liked it! Jeepers, it was coming home." He raised his eyes to her, luminous, cloudless. "I belonged there. Don't you see?"

"Yes. I see." And she saw the birth of gladness in her son. But then she remembered the place, stuffy and ornamental, and the people, shallow and smug. She had scorned them, but Jerry belonged. Queer that the blood of Angelino had been at home on Beacon Hill. Yet it was true; Jerry was a Wyatt.

The boy continued, goading his words on but reddening

as they fell. "My father explained things—things I didn't understand—about you——"

"Oh?" The coldness of her last encounter with Ken benumbed her like ice water trickling across her wrists. "And?"

"He said you were the most beautiful woman in the world and the most talented. He said you were in Grandfather's house once and wore a dress like flame. He said you didn't belong there because you outshone everybody and everything. Once Father took me to the mission and showed me where he works. He said you were very young there, that you had lots of big things to do and you did them, too. You aren't like ordinary people, he said; he and I might get lost in the shuffle, but that's a little thing counting all else, all the people you've helped. He said . . ."

Jenny brought the back of her hand up hard against her mouth. Oh, God, Ken, in the end you were as kind as in the beginning.

"And he said that we should love you and be proud because we belonged to you a little, that we were lucky to have that much." Jerry's hair curled damply on the broad forehead beaded with the effort of his confession.

She thought, he's half boy and half young man, and I don't know him at all. She managed to whisper: "Your father is very kind."

"Yes, kind, and something else."

"What?"

"He needs me. Truly he needs me. Nobody else in all the world ever needed me before!"

You are growing up, she thought. Maybe some day we can be friends, you and I. "It's good to be needed, and it's good to be kind. I'm glad you and Ken have found each other. I promise I'll never come between you, if that's what worries you."

"Thanks, Mother. I just wanted you to know what's happened. I wanted to say I—I—don't hate you any more." He hid his face in the crook of his arm. She wanted to go to him, but she could not. After so many years she had to begin at the beginning. "Thank you, Jerry," she said. "Thank you very much."

Neither of them could speak for a time. Then they tried other subjects. She showed him her books and lessons. They compared notes, shared likes and dislikes, and laughed together. God bless you, Ken Wyatt! Finally, she took him on a tour of the temple buildings. Both her creations, she reminded herself fiercely—this boy and this shrine—had grown strong and independent. They stood together in the blue-rose shadows of the great temple itself while the organ resounded against the far ceiling.

"Some place!" Jerry observed. "Must be terrific filled with people." Then he added: "I go back to-morrow. Father wanted me in Marblehead in time for some sailing before school."

"Of course. I understand. I'm glad you came. And when you see your father give him my—my regards."

"I—I'm sorry." Suddenly his arms ringed her waist, his bony head butted against her breast. "Sorry for so much before."

She smoothed the back of his head, the black and shining hair so like her own. "There's nothing to be sorry for any more. Not for either of us, Jerry. It's all right."

His face revealed both the storm of his longing and the shame of giving way. "It is all right?"

"Why, Jerry, we're friends now."

"Yes." He drew back. "Will you come to see me off to-morrow?"

But to-morrow was Friday. And Friday was for Rocky.

After three days of separation nothing could keep her from him, not even this new-found son. "I'm sorry, honey. I have to work. But I'll see you to-night."

"O.K. I just asked." He had recovered his poise. "Well, I'll be going along. See you later."

As he strode off, the last strength drained out of her. To-day Jerry did not hate her, but what would happen later? When they learned about Rocky, would Ken save her then?

At three o'clock, at the end of the bus line, she found Rocky in a mood of rare delight. They drove miles up the canyon and parked in a pungent pine grove overlooking the green and gold valley, the spattering of miniature ranch houses. To be with Rocky, to be loved like this, made Jenny's life right again. She felt almost as though they could win together some day.

But they couldn't remain long on the mountain. Rocky explained: "I have a lot to do in a hurry. And you have a service to-night. Make it your best, Jenny. Make it so nobody will ever forget."

"I always make it my best," she answered, mystified.

Part way down the steep road, she noticed another car, half concealed in brush, and her heart contracted in inexplicable terror. It wasn't Sam's car, but maybe someone else was following them, the press, anyone. "Oh, Rocky, don't let them take this away!"

He teased her about her suspicions. "Fishing, probably," he said. "Did you see anyone?"

"I'm not sure."

"Fishing then."

"I'm too jumpy, I guess."

"Yes, Jen, but it's going to be all right. To-night."

When he stopped by the bus station he added: "Listen, Jenny, I have a surprise for to-night."

"Are you coming to the service?"

"No, later. At eleven-thirty when the others have all gone. Remember the time, Jen—eleven-thirty on the nose. I'll drive up in front of the temple to pick you up. Be there."

"That's risky, isn't it?" He had never met her at the temple before. "Won't it wait until to-morrow?"

"No. It has to be this way. To-night. Just come out: I'll be waiting."

"If you're sure, all right."

He kissed her tenderly. "To-night, Angel, and always."

She toiled over her service. Forgive seventy times seven. Make it her best, Rocky had ordered. Why? She skipped supper in order to take a nap; but she dreamed that she was being torn in half by Rocky tugging all alone on one side, and a thousand nameless souls on the other. She awoke and plunged into a stinging-cold shower.

In the wings she was astonished to encounter Sam:

"I took Jerry into the city. He's a fine boy." He spoke casually, but spite and malice were large in his face.

She shivered and turned toward the stage. Six high-school girls in virgin white were singing a hymn. Lovely girls, sacred music—that new tenor soloist could break the heart with his pleading. She concentrated on the programme, attempting to erase Sam and Mollie, glad when the trumpet called her forth. In the pulpit she preached as usual, the ideas cascading dramatically as she intended. She looked deeply into all the faces, row on row, as if she were seeing them for the first time—or the last—and she loved them with the wild, rending, physical passion that

she had only known for Rocky. She made genuine and intense love under the spinning spotlights. The people responded blindly, meekly, but completely. Their reverence created a silence to swamp the great temple. "I love you all. I want to thank you for coming here again and again so that we may be together." She stepped down on to the carpeted platform and issued the invitation, "Come to me. Oh, sinner, come."

Mollie was sobbing. How many weeks since Jenny had caused her this kind of tears! "It's like she was saying goodbye and don't know it," she said to Sam.

"Nonsense!" Sam handed her his handkerchief, and she dried her red-rimmed eyes before Jenny could see them.

At eleven Sam was still in his office. Everyone else had vanished—except Jenny. He was sure her door had not opened. He was waiting for it. The hush of the temple thickened. Sam crouched in the hush and the obscurity and rehearsed, as he had rehearsed all the last spite-filled weeks, the nastiness that he would fling at Jenny. He would call her what she was and witness the humiliation on the beautiful, arrogant face he had once loved. He wanted to bruise her bodily, to injure her permanently for having snatched away from him everything that gave his life lustre and meaning. At first he had aimed his vengeance at Rocky; but Rocky was a nebulous figure, a tool of ruin, while Jenny was the reality and the cause. To-night as he beheld her performance, an Angel personally unacquainted with transgression, his gall concentrated on her. Tomorrow he would return to Chicago, to Martha if she wanted him, to his grandson. He would be sane again: an old man, dull, dwelling on a back street, but sane. First, however, he had a monstrous job to do in order to be free for sanity. He had to hurt Jenny. Where was she?

God Almighty, what was she waiting for? Or whom? God damn his hide, his soul, God damn Patina! Sam's fist pounded his desk top. And God damn her too!

Jenny's footsteps creaked in the hall. Sam bounded up. The telephone under his elbow screamed, throwing him into panic. Automatically he picked up the receiver.

"Where's Miss Angel?"

"Gone out."

"Stop her. Christ's sake, go catch her. Warn Rocky they're following him. They're after him to-night. Now. Beat it."

Frenzy splattered Chips's voice and whipped Sam into unthinking action. He ran. He saw Jenny in vaporous white floating down the path ahead toward the kerbed, parked car. Sam shouted. He ran, shouting: "Jenny, Jenny."

She halted an instant, turned toward him, then away as if to flee. He caught up with her: "Wait."

"Let me go, Sam. Rocky——"

Over her head he saw the headlights spin up the drive, heard the ripping explosion of gunfire, and the roar of a motor vanishing, indistinguishable, in the dark. With a rough hand Sam smothered Jenny's cry, dragged her inside, clear into her study, and waited there, propping the swaying, struggling figure between the wall and himself. A moment later speedy steps answered the gunshots. A moment more and, in Sam's office, Rudy was yelling into the phone: "Yes, officer, he's sure dead. Very dead. Head near blown off. Awful mess. Ycs, sir, Patina. Right here at the temple."

Commotion clattered across the temple lawns, but the halls were vacant. Unseen and unseeing, Sam got Jenny

to her room and summoned Mollie. "Give her something to make her sleep," he ordered. "Don't let anyone near her. Say she collapsed right after the service. You gave her a sleeping pill. She doesn't know anything. You understand?"

Mollie was staring at him. "Those shots?"

"Yes. They killed Rocky Patina. Right out there. They almost killed her too. I stopped her." Hysteria threatened him, and he stood still trying to settle down. "Nobody else knows about them. Nobody is going to. Understand?"

"Nobody, Sam," Mollie said. "You're good, Sam. Sometimes I wasn't sure lately, but you're good."

"Keep moving. Do as I say. Cover up for her, Mollie, and it'll be O.K."

In his own room Sam began to think—clearly and without emotion. It was a good sensation, strangely rid of hate, good even in the midst of murder. The police would be up soon, prying, probing, and the reporters would be right behind. He must be ready. He splashed ice water on his face and arms and combed his hair. Then he sat down and examined logically and thoroughly the theory he would offer. One of Rocky's gang had done the shooting. Probably the police had concluded that themselves. But why here? Why the temple? Well, he came often. Everyone knew it. Lots of talk of his getting converted. Big story, big thing for the Scarlet Angel. Anybody could see how a threat of conversion would scare the rest of the gang. A man gets saved; he talks too much. So they killed him. Why to-night? Maybe he attended the service. Sam couldn't be sure among the many thousands. Maybe he wanted to be alone. Who could say why a guy like Patina did things?

"I suppose nobody saw the shooting." The police

lieutenant remarked wistfully. "Everybody gone by then."

"Yes. All gone."

"Odd guy," the policeman muttered. "Educated. Alone. We couldn't dope him out like the others."

The reporters' notebooks were filling rapidly. In grim composure Sam eyed the circle of men about him.

"Maybe he was getting religion," the lieutenant continued idly, "or maybe he was pulling out. Found two tickets to Mexico City in his wallet. I don't know. Maybe he just wanted to come up to the temple again before leaving. Always open?"

"Yes."

"Yeah. Well, someone caught on he was leaving, didn't like it, followed him, killed him."

There it was, Sam thought, all tied up neatly. Please God, let it hold.

"We'll be back. Have to see Miss Angel. Just for the records."

"Of course. She's ill though; she was in bed when it happened. She won't know much to help, but she'll be glad to talk to you."

They were sorry she was ill, sorry to have to disturb her. They went away quietly, even the reporters.

When he was alone Sam started to laugh. Helplessly, he lay on his bed and choked with laughter and despair and exhaustion.

At the morgue, Chips Magoon identified Rocky's body. At the police station he reported that any one of a hundred or more would prefer Rocky dead. For convenience sake he listed a select few. He hedged when necessary, but for the most part he was honest without revealing anything.

Then he strolled over to the Black Diamond, let himself

in the back way, and opened the safe in Rocky's office. The night's profits were stacked inside as Chips had figured. He pocketed a sizeable amount, contemplated the index file an instant with blackmail in mind. But he knew he wasn't clever enough for that; without Rocky, he'd get into a mess of trouble. So he carried the file out to the alley incinerator and burned it to the last ash, not thinking about much, but feeling vaguely sad. Well, Rocky got his due. A man could get too smart. He touched his hat to the vacant office, the empty Black Diamond, and whistled for a cab. Ten blocks later, he changed cabs, and then again and again. Finally, he hopped a train, moving farther and farther away until Chips Magoon melted out of sight as completely : s had Rocky's other bodyguards. Nobody ever found him.

Chapter five

JENNY drifted in her fog, its grey, undulating waves protecting her like cotton batting around a silver spoon. Occasionally the fog thinned, disclosing Mollie or Sam, anxious, pitying, confirming the truth, the night, the terrible, terrible gunfire, and Rocky's death. She would moan and fly back to her fog until, at last, no matter how she willed it to stay, the mist thinned and thinned, and she was alive in her own bed. And Rocky was gone forever.

"He's gone." She stated the incredible fact of her loss. "He can't come again." Her eyes were stark and knowing, but demanded that Sam deny it, for he was sitting by her when she came back to reality.

All the days and nights of Jenny's shock and illness, Mollie had nursed her, had listened to "Rocky, Rocky!" squeezed between parched lips, and so had come to believe that the Lord had taken cruel vengeance on His own. Mollie then loved Jenny as she had never loved her before, without joyful admiration but with abiding compassion. She would let no one sit by her except Sam, and then only when she herself bordered on prostration. They had agreed

that no one else should see her yet, lest the cry for Rocky be repeated.

The outside world accepted the whole affair as Sam had planned. The police acknowledged the murder as gangland's method of taking final care of its own. The papers had a short but violent pictorial heyday while they buried Rocky. The head waiter at the Diamond arranged the funeral, a gaudy parade with carnation horseshoes, wreaths of roses, and gardenias so numerous and sweet that the whole street smelled of Rocky's passing. The morbidly curious mobbed the funeral parlours. From the temple old Ben presented himself as a reluctant delegate. In formal and austere black he lasted out the proceedings, disgusted at the obvious hypocrisies of men. Tensely he reported the event to Mollie and Sam and concluded by calling upon God to damn the soul of Rocky Patina and all his ilk to everlasting hellfire. A week later Mollie told him everything. She and Sam might need his help with Jenny, and he could not help, she thought, unless he knew the truth. Even Sam recoiled when in righteous fury Ben again damned Patina's soul. "And Jenny's too?" Mollie whispered. Old Ben withered into nothingness before her. "The Lord will tend to her. She suffers now."

Sam was thinking of this, her suffering, when Jenny spoke. "He's gone."

"You're awake, Jenny?" Only the cloud of black hair cast up against the pillow, only the eyes, black coals charred in the pallor of her skin, were proofs of the beloved Jenny. So the Lord had tended to His own! Sam felt only pity now. Bags packed, he was staying just to pilot her through the police interview. After that he would shed this place forever. Shed Jenny too? He wasn't sure.

"How long, Sam?" she asked.

"A week or so."

"That's not long to be safe. Oh, Sam, I can't be safe any more."

"No." He wanted to take one of her bone-thin hands, but he dared not touch her. He might remember too much of either love or hate. God, what have you done to my Jenny Angel? "But you will be all right soon. You have lots of things to do. Your people, Jenny, hundreds of cards, flowers, calls, prayers. They love you." He wasn't sure she was listening, although she was looking at him.

"And you, Sam, you don't hate me now?"

"No, Jen." He bent to catch her next words.

"Please don't love me either. I hurt everything. Say you don't love me any more, either."

Sam blinked down at his bloodless knuckles clamped together, and half lied. "No, Jen, I don't love you either."

"Good," she sighed, and seemed to sleep.

On Friday the doctor allowed her to sit up. On Sunday two self-conscious and respectful detectives did their duty. Sam had readied her for the ordeal. Now he perched beside her catlike, prepared to leap if he were needed. He wasn't. She performed obediently, replied carefully if listlessly, accepted their apologies for troubling her. But when they went she asked: "Whom are we protecting, Sam?"

"You—and the temple."

"Oh, yes, the Temple of Light."

At last, Sam told himself, he was free to go, and he steeled himself to say goodbye. He came to her room in the evening while she sat before the open window, noting how the yellow lamps in the temple garden threw patterned shadows over the singing fountains. He entered, hat in hand.

"I've come to say goodbye."

"You're leaving now?"

"Yes."

"You're not coming back, are you?"

"No." But he thought suddenly that if she asked him, if she even implied she wanted him—"No, Jenny, I'm going to Chicago to be—to be a grandfather, I guess."

She smiled faintly. "You'll make a nice grandfather. The temple, Sam—we built that. We created one good thing."

"You'll be preaching there soon," he assured her.

"They say this Charlie Bennet that Ben found to take over while I was ill—" She was losing her breath trying to be matter-of-fact. "They say he's rather good but—"

"But he's not the Scarlet Angel."

"I suppose not. Oh, Sam!"

Don't cry out to me like that, Jen. Don't look at me at all. He brushed her shoulder lightly with one hand and made himself march toward the door.

"Well, Rudy's waiting in the car. I must go."

"I know. Go, then, and good luck."

How do you put the love and the hate of all those years into farewell? How do you say it? Sam didn't. He said instead: "Sorry, Jen," and hurried out. But he thought he heard her weeping. I could go back. Rocky's dead. I could wait. Some day she would be mine. I could go back. But his feet rushed him down the stairs, into the car.

"Take care of her, Rudy."

"Yes, sir, Mr. Wilcox. It sure ain't the same without her. Bennet's O.K. But my trumpet, it cries for Jenny. You know what I mean?"

"Yes, I know."

Sam wandered into the club car, and attempted a high-ball. His fingers were shaking so that the ice clinked

against the glass. The portly gentleman advised him: "You'd best take it easy, man—you're all shot already." Sam fled back to his own berth. There, guarded by the heavy curtains, he thought: This could be five years ago—eight—the rumbling wheels, the night music, Jenny Angel in the same car, travelling on and on, the Scarlet Angel, beautiful, almost his. If only they hadn't stopped. Maybe he could go back, a week in Chicago, and then back. But Sam knew he wouldn't go. He was an old man, coughing up ragged sobs, too sore, too tired to ride the blazing comet again. Maybe there wasn't any comet either. He was a broken man to-night, taking the train home, and crying to himself.

Mornings Ben began to teach Jenny again. They studied, read, talked, but Ben wasn't the same. For her his eyes had lost their compassion and their understanding. A prophet without mercy, she thought, is surely to be feared above all people. She trembled.

"Are you cold, Jenny?"

"No. Not cold. Just scared." She laid the raw truth between them. "You know about me and Rocky."

"Yes."

"And it cancels all else?"

"You smashed all the laws. You committed vile, common adultery. What did it get you, even with Patina? You killed him."

"I—— No, Ben, no. I didn't kill him. I loved Rocky."

"You killed a lot of things. Something in Sam, in Mollie. As the Scarlet Angel, your burden must be hideous. Your real cross is guilt."

"Guilt?" If she added guilt to the pain and the loss, how could she survive?

"Yes, guilt. You profaned the sacred, desecrated the holy. You betrayed the Scarlet Angel."

She closed all the books and upended them in a trim file. "Now you may go, Ben," she said without rancour. "Take your learning with you. When I need it, I'll let you know." A monstrous weariness ate at her spirit. "I'm sorry for many things, Ben. Don't condemn me more."

"I have a mandate from the Lord. You have condemned yourself."

Every morning at five Jenny went to the temple alone when the dusk and silence were still heavy. Sometimes she waited on a front pew for a streak of sun through the arched rose panes. Sometimes she lit a candle to stab a hole in the gloom. Always she cried in the dim vastness: "Rocky, Rocky! If you love me, reach me." There was no sign. One day she cried "God!" also. There was no answer. Yet regularly she arrived with the dawn, crying "Rocky" or "God" and waiting, defenceless, hopeless, knowing nothing else to do. The days were all alike, blurred and formless, and the nights were worse; but in the end, they too passed, somehow.

Another morning came. She crossed the yard, lit her taper, sat back to call again: "Rocky!" A memory answered, intricate, silken, rich as tapestry, and another and another. Everything she had loved about Rocky, all the good things, the strength, the happiness, all the treasure which these last painful weeks had buried too deep in her for finding, all came back. "Rocky!" The agony was less; the healing had begun. On the next day her senses started to waken, and then other memories, and finally the Scarlet Angel herself. She stared about the auditorium, imagining the filled seats, the people. The Scarlet Angel

would demonstrate out of her own sorrow and sickness such compassion, such help as they had not guessed possible. "O God, I—" The single syllables rang against the stone pillars, a frail, infinitesimal prayer, but not quite lost. Jenny became immobile. An answer beat inside her. A God, then, after all these years! Some God even for her?

But she shook with dismay, for this was not the God she preached. Here, instead, was judgment, thunder, chastisement. If this God had eyes, they would be like Ben's steely, ancient, and without mercy. So, Ben, I am guilty. I've injured many, and I'm sorry. Now she was ill with being sorry. But Rocky—I'm not sorry for loving him! She defied the implacable fate in the temple, but she could not stay away. Driven, encompassed in melancholy, weighted by guilt, she sent again for Ben. She asked: "What must I do? Others have been forgiven. I helped them."

"You're different. You're the Scarlet Angel."

"Suppose all that time I was only acting a part? You know I wasn't the Scarlet Angel in reality."

"It's a part you chose yourself."

"Ben, you're all I have to advise me. What does this God of yours want? That I confess my sins and repent? Is that it?"

"That's part of it."

"Then I will, to you." If she had been looking at Ben she would have caught the flush of tears, but she was resting her haunted eyes on the green walls and the seascape. "I am sorry," she said steadily, "I—"

Relentless in his priestly role, Ben said: "Those hours with Patina, that terrible thing you called love. You are sorry for that?"

"I guess it's no use, Ben. No, I am not sorry for Rocky and the only time in my life I was really happy."

Bitterly Ben rose. "Then I cannot help you. God cannot help you. If you do not repent, who can grant forgiveness?"

"I don't know. The Scarlet Angel maybe? She's going to preach two weeks from Sunday."

"So?" Ben bowed slightly in acknowledgment. "You feel you have the right?"

She shrugged and turned away. Despair clamped over her again, shutting out everything except the guilt which Ben imposed on her and the loss which Rocky's death created. Where was the Scarlet Angel?

Jenny was determined to preach again. Mollic, recalling how the people could cure Jen's ills, egged her on. Stacks of mail clamoured for her. Phone calls demanded her. Church groups supplicated her. Even Charlie Bennet, who used her pulpit, urged her to return to them. Big, bluff, sincere, and, in her presence, humble, Charlie brought the people's summons to her.

"I hear you are doing well," she said half grudgingly.

"In the temple, in the word of God, well enough; but these people want their soul."

"Their— Yes. Tell them I'll be back in two weeks. But you'll stay on awhile."

"Thank you," he paused, "I'd like to say—"

"What?" His clumsy humbleness annoyed her.

"It's a privilege to be near you, an honour to work for the Scarlet Angel."

"That's kind of you. I'll see you later." She detected the sharpness in her dismissal and was ashamed for her unfairness. Once the Scarlet Angel had accepted humility graciously as her due. Well, Jenny? Well, act the Scarlet Angel.

The temple and all the surrounding territory rejoiced.

The Angel was returning to her own. Fine, fine, thought Jenny drearily, riffling the familiar blue and scarlet handbills. The sheep will come, all right. But what do I feed them? Please, God, even the grim God of Ben and judgment, what do I say? Nothing, said the blank green walls day after day. Nothing. Then the answer struck swift and hot like lightning.

She was standing in her own pulpit at early-morning vigil when she had her revelation. Ben's God wanted her punished. Good; she deserved it. Why not accept public punishment? Why not bring down upon her own head humiliation, shame, abasement in the sight of all her people? Do it herself. There was the drama, the inverted glory, castigating herself with scourges! She would confess all her sins, even Rocky, boldly, baldly, in obvious fear, in overt trembling. She would be one with them, kneeling among them, sorrowing also, lamenting, forgiving and being forgiven, wouldn't she? How could they have forgotten that she had prepared them for this very hour? For a while they might encounter shock and horror. Then she would take a trip—a pilgrimage to the Holy Land. Mollie would like that. When the people had had a chance to react with mercy as she had taught them, she would return: the Scarlet Angel, purged, chastised, squared with the laws of man and God, ready to lead them. Jenny felt lightheaded, yet sure of herself. She could not rely on God or Ben, but she could depend on her people! She had transformed humiliation into victory before; she would repeat her performance on a larger scale. She could imagine the time of distant triumph, but the punishment was first, Sunday night.

The sun was bright when relief swept over her in such tremendous waves that even the temple could not hold her.

She raced outside and leaned against the grey stones and faced seaward to where, beyond the dipping lawns, the two stone angels stood guard at the gate.

Ben Hayes, plodding the gravel path, a finger folded in his ponderous book, his eyes downcast, glanced up, astonished at Jenny's new radiance. Something had happened, and before it, whatever it was, he was afraid. Gently he addressed her like one waking a sleepwalker: "What is it Jenny? What happened?"

"Oh, Ben!" She was glad to see him. He would be the first to know that the days of suffering could be counted, three hundred, four hundred maybe, but limited. She told him how, and, because she was so sure in her heart, she could not comprehend his wrath when she had finished.

The personification of all the prophets of all ages, he let his voice slash out at her. "No. You cannot do this to the people. You have no right. Whatever guilt you carry for your sins with Patina, whatever unworthiness you feel in the temple—God knows it must be plenty—that has nothing to do with them. Go away. Repent honestly. Come back humbly, humbly, Jenny Angel, if you can. You cannot throw your burdens on your people."

"But it's a way out."

"A way out! Is that important? These thousands, they love you, trust you, believe in you. They lost their way, you found them. They lost hope, you restored it. They sinned, you saved them. So they believe, so they live."

"And for that I have no credit?"

"None." He sank down on a bench, all energies spent. "You cannot hurt them," he said sadly. "You cannot ruin their trust. Do you understand?"

She understood that he was stealing her future freedom, sealing up the Scarlet Angel's only avenue of escape. She

fought him. "In the old days they stoned women taken in adultery, but Jesus said——"

"You thought this would be your stoning? It is too easy. You deserve the slow poison of ugliness rotting out your heart until—until you can make peace with yourself and my God."

"For me there is judgment. No mercy?"

Old Ben closed his eyes. More than seventy years had taught him that for those who chose the high and separate path, who deliberately walked apart as "chosen people," there was only a God of judgment. That was the price paid. "No, no mercy for you," he said, placing a hand, brittle-dry like an autumn leaf, upon her bowed head. "I don't know too much any more, Jenny, but I know that. About Sunday, I beg of you not to hurt your people; but I can't stop you."

No, he couldn't, she decided when the emotional gale had subsided and she could plan again. On the last late afternoon she was neither scared nor sad. She was remarkably placid, certain her confession would work out. With Mollie she shared a telegram from Ken and Jerry, hot coffee, and pleasant talk. Agog, Mollie reported: "The temple's fair to busting. Such excitement. Such happiness. People all over the place, and flowers, Jenny, from everybody, a whole cross of Scarlet Angel roses from the greenhouse. It's a holiday around here, a real holiday." She babbled on as she wielded the brush on Jenny's hair, but Jenny wasn't fooled. Mollie hadn't forgotten Rocky, nor Sam. She had forgotten nothing. Her voice was too shrill, her eyes too dry.

"Don't try so hard, Mollie," she advised quietly. "It's all right." She considered herself in the mirror and decided: I've changed. Thinner, paler, but that's not bad

for to-night Reminds them I've been sick. Starts up pity.
Pity for the Scarlet Angel? Queer that it could be possible!
And useful. Yes, pity to-night! No rouge, a mere slit of
lipstick to accent the mouth, then don the silk robe, pick
up the Bible and the rose. All appointments were correct
as at other times, other places. But not quite!

"No hand of God, Mollie?"

Dumbly Mollie shook her head. "We're on our own." Jenny had always known that, but Mollie had never known it before, and she was a little lonely.

Backstage was jammed with workmen and well-wishers and Charlie Bennet, big and humble. No Sam of course, and out there in the balcony no hope of Rocky. Ben touched her, and she winced. "Don't hurt them too. Love them, Jenny."

She turned from him. Now was the time; as it had been thousands of other nights, it would be again, please, somebody's God. Now—the house lights dimmed, the spot-lights, rose, white, yellow, searched her out, pawing the stage before her entrance. Rudy's trumpet lifted in golden fire. The music poured forth like no other music on earth, hers. Glorious, victorious, heralding her return, loving her. The triumphant notes dissolved into sweet notes, calling her. Come, Jenny Angel, come. Flowers banked the chancel, a new red carpet laid out a royal greeting from altar to pulpit. Candles fluttered, the brass cross shone.

She walked slowly, stopping by the six-foot cross of roses to pluck one, not minding its thorns, not minding anything on the whole earth save that she was here. Rows of indistinct people multiplied beyond the footlights. She could sense them sending her their happiness, paying homage, offering love, a living, vibrant reality. And she loved them too, as she had loved them that last time,

passionately, physically. She heard herself talking to them unwaveringly, tenderly. Something began to crumble inside her; hope was vanishing. You are not worthy, Ben had said. She never had been; it didn't matter. You cannot hurt them, Ben had said. Why not? To save herself? Wasn't that fair, since she could come back later and heal them too? Love them, Ben had said.

When she finished her message, she bowed her head. At the prearranged signal, the spotlights deserted her to settle on the young tenor at his place above the organ. In his black robe he stood to give the call, "Softly and tenderly." In her island of darkness Jenny was struggling desperately to shut off idiotic tears. The song tore at her. "Come home, ye who are weary." It's rotten sentimentality, she reminded herself, and I will not listen. Whether she listened or not was unimportant. She knew bitterly and irrevocably that Ben would have his way. She could not tell them. The lights drifted invitingly down on to the lower platform where the confessed sinners gathered, one by one, timid, dazed, proud, and knelt before her. Stubbornly she moved to the top of the steps, and paused, confused. She didn't know what to do next. The half-circle of transgressors was reciting waywardness. "I hated my wife, I'll do better." "I drink; with your help I'll reform." "I stole from my boss, but, God helping me, I'll make it up." "Forgive me. Forgive me." A dozen claims of human weakness issuing out of apologetic faces, requiring her personal attention. The dozen kneeling, the thousands sitting and standing, Mollie, Ben, Charlie—they all waited. She must do something. She faltered, caught her heel on her hem and tottered against the cross of scarlet roses. "Help me," she cried to no one. Mollie's arm was through hers, drawing her toward safety while

behind her Charlie Bennet uttered a benediction. The service had ended for everyone when Jenny Angel swayed and left them. They dispersed, subdued and troubled in spirit, whispering uneasily together as though death had cast its shadow over them.

Jenny slept late and fitfully Monday morning. Over coffee she confided wearily to Mollie: "I think I'll only preach occasionally for a while."

"No hurry, Jenny. The temple will be waiting. You've been a long way down. Takes time."

When Ben appeared, bent and withered proving his seventy-five years, Jenny thought: Why, he's no prophet—he's merely an old man.

He said: "I thank you for the people, Jenny. You hurt no one."

"Except myself," she corrected.

"But that is necessary. You will hurt yourself a lot before you are finished."

"Perhaps." She was beyond worrying any more, almost beyond caring.

All morning the phone and the doorbell pealed with inquiries for Miss Angel. Was she ill? Was she retiring? Was she returning? When? Soon? Jenny answered helplessly: "I don't care what you tell them, Mollie. I don't know myself. I only know I'm tired, and I have to get away from here."

"Sure, Jenny, you go along now. We'll tend to things. Go, have a good time."

A good time? There had been so few, and all with Rocky. Jenny drove the car hard and fast, north on the main highway. With the top down, the sun lay a gentle

benediction on her head. With the wheel in her hands, the power of her engine was an encouragement to her spirit. She was alone and free; and the wind whistling in her hair and the motor humming in her ears made a glorious song. Presently she turned off the highway into the mountain road, steep, curving, slippery but familiar because of the hiding place for herself and Rocky. Ah, Rocky which of us was destroyed? Who knows? The mountains were kind to her that morning; their rugged crags and pines stood impassive, immortal, dwarfing all human passions, asking nothing of her. They hid their secrets within cool depths. Jenny saw no animals, no birds, no people, and she was glad. Up here, between wood and sky, a blue emptiness was at home, and she belonged to it. At noon she stopped by a swift stream and munched on Mollie's chicken sandwiches; then she switched on the radio to hear Charlie Bennet keeping the Temple's Radio Hour open for her. He spoke worshipfully of last night, of the Scarlet Angel's beauty and power and divinity. Jenny, listening, knew with a slow, inexorable clarity that this Scarlet Angel of scared image had nothing whatsoever to do with her any more. Yet she couldn't quite believe that. I'm tired, she reminded the cutting fear in her, I'm ill and tired. I'll think about it to-morrow. Later I'll be the Angel again. Not now. And she turned her cheek to the soft leather seat and slept.

She woke to distant rumbling of thunder. The summer clouds were dyed black and angry; the tops of the giant trees had begun to tremble. Hastily, she backed out on to the road. If the rain started before she could get out, her exit could become impassable. She looked up. The screaming wind, the streaming clouds, the lightning challenged her. All right, she would race the storm. Wild excitement

rose in her, like the first time she spoke at the Mission, like the night she dedicated the Temple, like all the hours with Rocky, like all the wild, wonderful, awful beginning moments in the world. Her foot was heavy on the accelerator, but her eyes were keen on the road ahead. Once she slowed at a clearing where the valley began to fall steeply away. There, below, illumined an instant by jagged lightning, the temple stood rooted deep into its own hill, solid, massive, eternal. Jenny thought that the lightning behind it was like the old Lighthouse lantern, blinking and beckoning to her, only bigger, brighter, braver.

She was laughing at that illusion when the rain struck in a flood. She felt her back wheels spin dangerously in the sudden mud. Well, she had been a fool to race the storm, but she might win yet. Her excitement mounted. The speed increased. Like a flying thing the blue car swung round the curves; like a living thing it leaped to drag itself free of the dark and rattling earth. Jenny heard the roaring of wind and rain and motors; she felt the tearing wrench when she left the earth and plunged into the void. Into the swallowing emptiness, into the coming peace she said "God," very quietly.